

The Mega Drive Book

Everything you need to know about Sega's 16-bit masterpiece

Includes The Super NES Book

Welcome to

The Mega Drive Book

It's amazing to think that Sega's Mega Drive is now an impressive 25 years old. When it was first released in October 1988, Sega desperately needed a home hit. Its previous 8-bit consoles had failed to break the stranglehold that Nintendo had created with the NES, leaving Sega with a small window of opportunity before Nintendo released its own 16-bit console. The end result was the Mega Drive — or Genesis as it's known in the US — an excellent machine that, buoyed by a host of stunning conversions and original IPs like Sonic The Hedgehog, managed to loosen Nintendo's iron grip on the market. Exclusives like Gunstar Heroes, Contra: Hard Corps, Mega Man: The Wily Wars and of course Sonic delivered exciting arcade-styled gameplay that made home computers and Nintendo's NES pale in comparison. So join us as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of Sega's fantastic console and highlight some of the best games to ever appear on its 16-bit masterpiece.



In association with retro GAMER magazine

The Mega Drive Book

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Website: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
Twitter: @Books_Imagine
Facebook: www.facebook.com/ImagineBookazines

Head of Publishing
Aaron Asadi

Head of Design
Ross Andrews

Editor
Darran Jones

Senior Art Editor
Greg Whitaker

Design
Perry Wardell-Wicks

Photographer
James Sheppard

Printed by
William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

Distributed in the UK & Eire by
Imagine Publishing Ltd, www.imagineshop.co.uk. Tel 01202 586200

Distributed in Australia by
Gordon & Gotch, Equinox Centre, 18 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest,
NSW 2086. Tel + 61 2 9972 8800

Distributed in the Rest of the World by
Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU

Disclaimer
The publisher cannot accept responsibility for any unsolicited material lost or damaged in the post. All text and layout is the copyright of Imagine Publishing Ltd. Nothing in this bookazine may be reproduced in whole or part without the written permission of the publisher. All copyrights are recognised and used specifically for the purpose of criticism and review. Although the bookazine has endeavoured to ensure all information is correct at time of print, prices and availability may change. This bookazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

The Mega Drive Book © 2013 Imagine Publishing Ltd

ISBN 978-1909758056

IMAGINE PUBLISHING







The Mega Drive Book Contents









8 RETROINSPECTION: MEGA DRIVE
Discover how Sega's 16-bit console – known as the Genesis in the US – helped change the fortunes of the company and made a huge impact on the game industry

14 PERFECT TEN: MEGA DRIVE
There are so many amazing games available on Sega's fantastic console, but these are the ones you shouldn't be without

16 AND THE REST: MEGA DRIVE
Take a seat, prepare your nostalgia glands and get set for some of the best and worse games for Sega's console

18 RETROINSPECTION: MEGA-CD
Sega's Mega-CD was nowhere near as bad as many thought. Find out why you shouldn't be without this exciting add-on

24 PERFECT TEN: MEGA-CD
Thought Sega's Mega Drive add-on was full of rubbish FMV games? Let us change your opinion with these ten gems

26 AND THE REST: MEGA-CD
Another blast from the past as we mark the highlights and lowlights from Sega's ill-fated add-on. How many did you play?

28 SONIC BOOM: THE SUCCESS STORY OF SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
Discover how a blue hedgehog changed the fortunes of both the Mega Drive and Sega itself

38 THE MAKING OF GUNSTAR HEROES
Find out how a group of talented Japanese developers left Konami and made one of the Mega Drive's greatest games

44 CLASSIC GAME: STREETS OF RAGE 2
Scintillating music, fantastic visuals and bone-crunching gameplay. It's little wonder Sega's sequel rules the beat-'em-up roost

46 THE MAKING OF FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
We reveal the interesting origins behind the most successful football franchises of all time

50 IMPORT ONLY: AAH! HARIMANADA
What do you mean sumo wrestling games are rubbish? The fantastic fighter from Megasoft begs to differ

25 YEARS OF CLASSIC GAMING











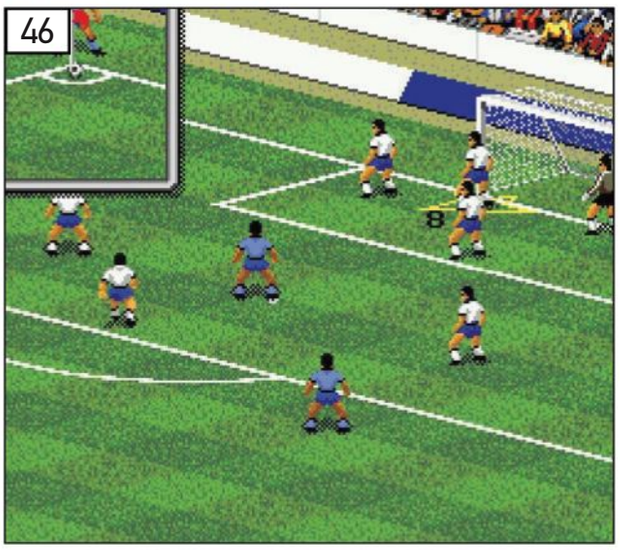


















52 THE ULTIMATE GUIDE: THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI
Everything you need to know about Sega's fantastic ninja sequel

58 RETRO REVIVAL: CASTLE OF ILLUSION STARRING MICKEY MOUSE
With a remake now available there's never been a better time to revisit Sega's magical love letter to Disney's mascot

60 MAKING OF: TOEJAM AND EARL
We reveal how a cat and some Post-it notes helped shape one of the Mega Drive's funkiest games

64 CLASSIC GAME: THUNDER FORCE III
Why Technosoft's incredible shooter remains our favourite game in the entire series

66 WHY YOU MUST PLAY: HERZOG ZWEI
The name might not be familiar, but you really need to experience Technosoft's fantastic strategy game

70 IMPORT ONLY: PULSEMAN
Don't miss out on Game Freak's quirky platformer, its last ever game for Sega, before it moved on to Pokémon

72 THE MAKING OF: THE IMMORTAL
Will Harvey talks gore, wizards and goblins as he discusses his amazingly atmospheric Mega Drive hit

76 THE ULTIMATE GUIDE: FLASH BACK
Our memory is miles better than Conrad B Heart's. Don't believe us? Look how much we know about his awesome adventure

82 RETRO REVIVAL: MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER
Relive some of the king of pop's best dance routines with this brilliant 16-bit platformer

84 THE MAKING OF SONIC SPINBALL
Discover how Sonic The Hedgehog and pinball collided to make one of the Mega Drive's most interesting games

88 TOP 25 MEGA DRIVES GAMES
Take a look at what we think are the best games the Mega Drive had to offer

94 COLLECTOR'S GUIDE: MEGA DRIVE
Desperate to start collecting for Sega's console? Of course you are. Use this guide to stay ahead of the competition

SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT

THE MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS WAS SEGA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CONSOLE, DELIVERING A WEALTH OF FANTASTIC DIVERSE GAMES THAT HELPED THE MACHINE SELL IN THE MILLIONS. JOHN SZCZEPANAIK EXPLAINS WHAT MADE SEGA'S CONSOLE SO ESSENTIAL



Modem Wars
Sega dabbled in modem usage for the Mega Drive. Nagumo-san explained, "It was called Mega-Modem, whose sales date was November 3, 1990. It is a modem unit for Mega Drive that enabled online game communication. It used analogue lines and its connection speed was 1,200bps. The service named 'Game Toshokan' enabled downloading of games, delivery of Sega-related news and online matches." Records vary wildly on how many games utilised online play (one source stating six). We only found solid confirmation regarding *TEL TEL Mah-Jong* and Stadium titles. More interestingly was the 'Game Toshokan', which allowed downloading of games like *Phantasy Star* text adventures, *Pyramid Magic* and *Flicky* to a special cartridge. Closing in 1993, fans worried the online-only games would be forever lost. Luckily in 1994 there were two Mega-CD compilations, *Sega Games Can Vol 1* and *2*, which included nearly all-available titles. Prized among *Phantasy Star* collectors, these are incredibly rare.



Nintendo's fate has often been intertwined with the Mega Drive system. It has long had a history of benefiting from Sega in one form or another, often due to the direct competitive challenge it posed. The SNES would have been nothing without the MD; the reverse is also true. It was the Mega Drive that pushed Nintendo's into updating its aged NES hardware, and it was also the Mega Drive that changed the market forever, cutting a trail towards the situation today. It is undeniably one of the most important pieces of hardware in gaming history. So it should have come as no surprise to find that MD games would support Nintendo's soon-to-be-released Wii system. In a moment of irony, it must be noted that Sega had already dabbled in downloadable MD games with The Sega Channel, making its announcement quite apt. The decision was obvious. Later Sega systems would prove difficult, technically, and also the MD was far more successful than the Master System. As will be shown, the MD can be credited for many things – it was a magical high Sega never again reached.

The Japanese debut was October 29, 1988. The widespread American release was less than a year later in 1989, while the United Kingdom had to wait roughly another year before it arrived in November 1990. To fully understand the importance of the Mega Drive's launch, you need to know what the international climate was like during the decadent Eighties.

Sega had already entered the console fray previously, with the successive releases of its SG-1000 Mark I, II and III systems in Japan (1981-1985), the 3rd model of which was redesigned as the Master System for Western countries. To be bluntly honest, despite it being technically superior to the Famicom/NES, it was a commercial failure that never gained more than a 5% market share. Only in Brazil was it able to officially eclipse Nintendo's 8-bit hardware. Throughout the mid-to-late Eighties Japan's console market was controlled almost entirely by the Famicom, which was popular beyond description. America was gripped by the NES, again with near total market dominance. The NES was also available in Europe and the UK, though Britannia was more enamoured with 8-bit micros than high-priced consoles.

In 1987 Hudson Soft and NEC jointly released the PC-Engine against the Famicom, two years later redesigning and releasing it in America as the TurboGrafx 16. When Sega decided to position its MD as a third competitor, the odds must have seemed impossibly high. According to David Sheff, Hiroshi Yamauchi dismissed Sega as not being a threat. Yamauchi was more concerned with NEC, which was investing roughly $3.7 billion into R&D, an amount greater than Nintendo's then annual sales. Sega meanwhile was only a $700 million company, and one founded by an American. As an underdog scrapping against NEC for second place, Sega and its MD was underestimated,

Year Released: Japan: 1988 USA: 1989 UK: 1990

Original Price: Japan: 21,000 Yen USA: $189.99 UK: £189.99

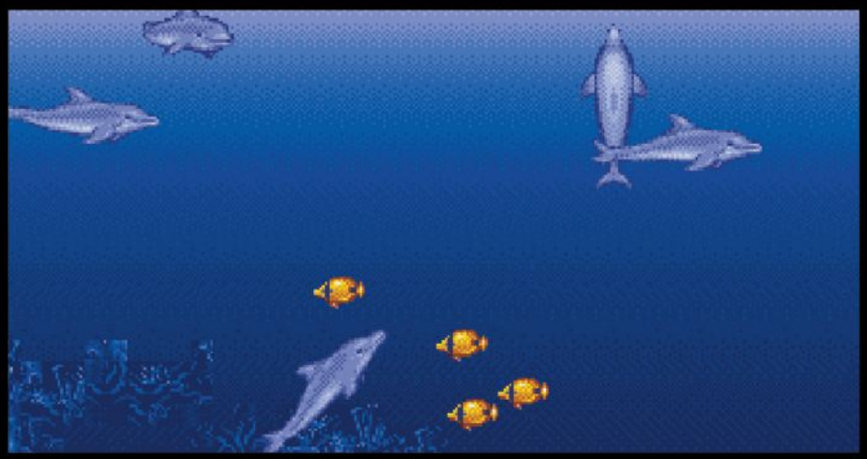
Buy it now for: £15+ ($30+)

Associated Magazines: Beep! Megadrive, Mega Drive Fan, GameFan, Mean Machines, Sega Visions Magazine

Why the Mega Drive was great… The Mega Drive ushered in the 16-bit era; some say the last golden era of gaming. It was a special kind of scene to be a part of. No explanation, no mix of words or screenshots or memories can ever touch that sense of knowing, that you were there, playing those great games during that point in time. Though this age has sadly passed, newcomers still need to understand.



SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT



» **Above and right:** [Mega Drive] *Ecco The Dolphin*, like many Mega Drive classics, has been re-released on various compilations.



"ATARI WAS OFFERED THE GENESIS AND JACK TRAMIEL TURNED IT DOWN. JACK THOUGHT THE DEAL WAS TOO EXPENSIVE" MICHAEL KATZ



Hybrid Children
A sign of the Mega Drive's popularity is the number of variations that exist. Beyond your standard models, there was the JVC Wondermega (Xeye in America), which combined MD and Mega-CD. Then there was the much smaller combined Multi-Mega (CDX in America), doubling as a portable CD player. Following this musical theme, there was the Aiwa CSD-GM1, combining the MD/MCD with a portable "Boom Box" radio. From CD to LD, Sega's champion was also included with Pioneer's Laseractive. MSX fans will be interested to know it was integrated into the AX-330 and AX-990 models, for Arabic distribution in Kuiwait and Yemen. Computer implementation didn't end there, since it was also hybridised into the Sega TeraDrive, a Japanese home computer. Meanwhile, the Western equivalent was the Amstrad Mega PC (see buyer's guide). Then there was the portable Nomad, and the Mega Jet, which was used by Japan Airlines. And the above doesn't even take into account the many bootleg clones about!



viewed by the industry itself as the weaker of the two. Retro Gamer spoke with Mr. Nagumo, the "Team Manager of SOJ CS Product PR", and asked many, many questions, few of them answered. When asked if, due to the impossible odds stacked against them, Sega had considered becoming a developer for either the Famicom or PC Engine, his answer was blunt. "No, we didn't."

Even so, Sega staff were curious about the Famicom. In two separate interviews (GameWeek and TNL) Yuji Naka admitted to making Famicom games run on the MD. His comments, amalgamated, were, "Oh my. [laughs] How do you people know about that one? Well yeah, actually I did. I once made a Famicom emulator for the Mega Drive. It was something fun to amuse myself with at the time. I couldn't play every game with it. But it was fun to call people over and show them Mario running around on a Mega Drive."

Origins Of Genesis

Sega's main source of profit during the Eighties was its hugely popular arcade games, like Yu Suzuki's *Space Harrier* and *Hang On*. To beat the competition the head of Sega, Hayao Nakayama, decided to create the first true arcade home system. He worked in secret with Hideki Sato, modifying Sega's System-16 hardware – the same hardware that powered arcade versions of *Shinobi* and *Altered Beast*. This would have allowed superior visuals and audio, leagues ahead of the competition. It would also allow for easier, more accurate arcade ports (which gamers would be familiar with), and therefore plenty of games.

The new console had to be scaled down from the System-16, in terms of processor speed and available on-screen colours, but Hideki Sato planned ahead and included some extras. It was backwards-compatible with the Master System (using the Power Base Converter), and it was also designed with the future potential to use a mouse, keyboard, 2-inch floppy disk drive, modem, graphics tablet, and printer. He even considered the possibility of someday attaching a CD drive.

Beep!, a multiformat Japanese mag, first announced the system in June 1988 alongside an early prototype drawing, tentatively calling it the Sega Mark V (following on from previous names). The internal project meanwhile was called Mk-1601, but Sega wanted something stronger for the launch. It went through 300 different proposals, before finally settling on Mega Drive.

Disappointingly the Japanese launch was very understated. Their penchant for lengthy, mind-boggling queuing in Akihabara had been forgotten; there were no such queues for the MD! Supply and publicity had been well organised, but the machine was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros 3*, released just one week earlier. Luckily magazines



» Most Mega Jets being sold come from an initial shipment hijacked by Indonesian sea-pirates. Their distribution was organised by underground collectors.



» A young Hideki Sato working on a prototype Mega Drive; he was the main designer behind it.









» Above and below: By using the Power Base Converter, the Mega Drive could play Sega's back-catalogue of Master System games.

» [Mega Drive] There are countless unlicensed Chinese (and Korean) games, like *Barver Battle Saga – The Space Fighter*. It was renamed *Final Fantasy* when translated into Russian.

like Famitsu and Beep! gave it positive coverage, and so a small but loyal following began. Reportedly 400,000 units were shipped in the first year.

Despite the low uptake in Japan, Sega went on to pursue highly risky and quite odd endeavours – bad for profits, great for collectors. Along with a gaming modem (see box-out), Sega created an online banking system for Nagoya Bank. The result was the Mega Anser (sic), complete with modem, numerical keypad, and grossly overpriced 'Mega Printer'. Sega also adapted the MD for arcade use, despite it already being based on the System-16 architecture. The results were the System C-2 board, and also the timed MegaTech and then MegaPlay systems; roughly, these three had a combined total of 80 games developed. Japan also received the rarest version of *Tetris* ever, and some sublime exclusive RPGs like *Rent-A-Hero* and *King Colossus* (both fan-translated).

But Japan was never what the Mega Drive was about. Success lay in the USA and Europe. Sega had the fight of its life ahead, and it would take not only gutsy determination to succeed, but also a damned excellent roster of games, and luck. Sega clearly had just enough of these, since it nearly conquered the industry.

Globally Gamed

To bolster the inside information available to Retro Gamer, Ken Horowitz of Sega-16.com kindly donated interviews he conducted with industry figures. One such individual was Michael Katz, former head of Sega's American branch, who presided over the Genesis' initial sales year. Katz explained the early days. "I arrived one month after Genesis launched. The company was small (under 50 people). They had gone through 2-3 Presidents (Gene Lipkin, Bruce Lowery) in the "Master System" days. Dave Rosen – Vice Chairman of Sega (and original founder), was overseeing the running of the company. I reported to him and Nakayama in Japan. Sega was basically a distribution company in the US. Hardware and software development came from Japan. I initially had to deal with keeping employees happy, determining the quality of the staff and getting into the job of building the Sega vs Nintendo juggernaut." Arriving after the American launch, Katz wasn't aware of the details surrounding the name change from Mega Drive to Genesis. Consensus states it was due to a trademark dispute. The facts are blurred, but point possibly to a US manufacturer of storage devices called Mega Drive Systems Inc.

We also questioned Katz ourselves, and he revealed a fascinating anecdote from before the Genesis launch. "I will tell you that Atari was offered the Genesis (when I was President of Atari Games Division) and Jack Tramiel turned it down. It would have gotten Atari back in the game with a 16-Bit system. I attended the meeting at Atari, when Dave Rosen (Sega Chairman) visited us (Jack and I) and made the offer. Jack thought the deal was too expensive, and he was more interested in the Atari ST computer project." The system filtering into America and Europe raises an important question for importers. Why the deplorable need for regional lockout? Katz admitted he had no control over it in America, "Lockout decisions were made in Japan. The Sega Japan International VP handled international sales and marketing." Never knowing when to quit, Retro Gamer pushed Japan's PR man into a corner until he commented. As Nagumo puts it, "We implemented the security regionally to prevent game software being imported due to gaps of sales time between regions." As he wipes the sweat from his brow, we jovially comment that thankfully it wasn't successful. Enterprising young hackers soon bypassed the security with special contraptions, and later, easy methods for modifying the hardware were devised.



» The rarest most expensive version of *Tetris*. Ever. You need underground contacts and plenty of money to join this elite 'owners club'.

IF FORCED TO SUMMARISE WHY THE MD IS SUCH A BLOODY FANTASTIC SLAB OF BLACK PLASTIC, IT'S BECAUSE IT'S ALL THINGS TO ALL GAMERS



SEGA'S 16-BIT HIT



IT WAS A SYSTEM WHERE THE ALLURE WAS BORN NOT ONLY OF THE HARDWARE AND GAMES, BUT THE MAGAZINES, PLAYGROUND ARGUMENTS, CLIMATE, AND POLITICS OF THE TIME

Channel Control

The Mega Drive has so many unusual anecdotes you need a hundred box-outs like this. With the announcement of downloadable MD games for Wii, we're highlighting the revolutionary Sega Channel.

Speaking with Nagumo-san again, we hoped for a pride filled statement that championed this pioneering achievement. His answer was somewhat subdued, "It was a cable television service in the US from which videogames could be downloaded. We started the service in cooperation with Telecommunications, Inc. One could play his favourite games as much as he liked at a fixed amount every month. We also had the same services in cooperation with regional cable televisions in Japan."

From 1993 games were made available for download (divided by genre), at a cost of $12.95 per month. Games were rotated every few weeks, encompassing nearly the entire library, plus a few unreleased titles and imports! They could be played indefinitely, but lasted only while the system was turned on.

Underground importing certainly didn't harm international sales. The MD is officially Sega's highest selling system. International figures are estimated to be between 30 and 35 million units, of which only 10% is attributed to Japan. Sega was determined to achieve those higher sales abroad; it demanded the American branch chant the Japanese word "HYAKUMANDAI" (that's "one-million" in English), in order to encourage sales. Katz elaborated, "The 'one million units' chant was representative of a goal set by Sega Japan. Did they just pluck the number out of thin air? I don't know. I think they thought that if we sold a million units in the first year that would make a big statement. They disregarded Nintendo's position and the fact that all key retailers would have to come on board immediately to hit the number, and also the need for a substantial software library from the get-go." Despite the daily chanting, sales only reached halfway. Katz went on, "We sold about 500K units — which I considered damn good — because Genesis was new, didn't have a large software library initially, and the Nintendo franchise was hard to crack."

In America it seemed Nintendo was unstoppable, and that was indeed its intention. It used some very unorthodox methods to maintain superiority. Stores were bullied into not carrying Sega products, and developers were forced to sign strict licensing agreements stating they'd only develop for Nintendo. But everyone loves seeing a tyrant deposed and a colossus fall, and so various developers began thinking of the Mega Drive as a serious, more profitable alternative. Popular companies like Namco changed allegiance, while EA reverse-engineered the system before developing high quality exclusives. This all helped make Sega a tempting alternative for consumers.

But as Katz explained, Sega wasn't too pleased with EA. "Sega was unhappy about EA reverse-engineering Genesis. We were in the process of giving EA/Trip a 'sweetheart' deal, then we needed a *Joe Montana* game in a hurry (the game being developed for us by Media Genic was way behind schedule), so I asked Trip for a back up *Madden* football game. He gave us one and that assured him a low/royalty free deal on Genesis software. The first *Montana* game being a '*Madden* back up' from EA is a little known fact."

The MD's huge success, of course, came with the arrival of *Sonic The Hedgehog*, a phenomenal mascot that endures to this day. But the question that has to be pondered is what if *Sonic* had not been a hit and never had the success that it did? When asked, Nagumo playfully hinted at the possibility that Sega had other titles, besides *Sonic*, with which to take on Nintendo and *Mario*. "We had the marketing and promotion strategies using various titles at that time. *Sonic* was one of them that led to a big hit." Katz saw things differently. When asked about SOA's initial dislike of the Sonic character, "I certainly underestimated the potential of *Sonic*. Thank God there was good and sustained gameplay (critical in any game success). I know that I thought it was nuts, when we were going for targeted and widespread awareness in everything we did, for the Japanese to develop a game based on a type of character — a hedgehog — that no kid in the American 6-16 year-old demographic would have any familiarity with. We knew we needed a great "character action" game to put in the line up. We were hoping for a *Donkey Kong* type hit. When *Sonic* was so hot, it was decided to bundle it with Genesis (just as ColecoVision was bundled with *Donkey Kong* in 1981). If Sega didn't have *Sonic*, Genesis sales would probably have been less, but it's hard to say. I don't know if Sega Japan had a back up – I think not. Sega Japan was responsible for developing the character action genre. We were responsible in the US for developing sports games."

Despite his great effort and the success he achieved in those early years, Katz was replaced by Tom Kalinske in 1990. Most agree that any successes were a result of combined team efforts, but that Katz is often unfairly overlooked in favour of his successor. In past interviews, Kalinske explained how *Sonic* became the pack-in title. "After my first month as CEO, I told Mr. Nakayama, 'You have to get rid of *Altered Beast*, the title that's bundled with Genesis. It sounds like devil worship. We have to get the price down to $149, and we have to develop more American software.' The board spoke for two



» [Mega Drive] With an unprecedented comic book styling, *Comix Zone* was one of many exclusive titles that made the Mega Drive worth owning.



» Japan's "Hyper Exciting Visual Game Magazine – Mega Drive Fan" was one of several dedicated publications





» **Top and bottom:** [Mega Drive] The anime influenced *Phantasy Star* series reached its peak with number 4. Few RPGs even come close to such magnificence.



» **Above and below:** [Mega Drive] Smooth like liquid napalm, *Ranger X* by Gau Entertainment is a frenetic blaster, with audio and visuals that'd melt the brain of those unaccustomed to it.



hours in Japanese and I was just sitting there, not understanding a word. Finally Mr. Nakayama said, 'No one here agrees with anything you've said.' I thought mine was going to be the shortest career in the business. But as I was walking out, he said, 'But I hired you to make the decisions for Europe and the Americas, so go ahead and do it.'"

Sega eventually annihilated the TurboGrafx 16, and it was doing well against the NES, but the sleeping giant had awakened, and in 1990 Nintendo launched the SNES. The ultimate grudge match began, which even today, remains fresh in peoples' hearts and minds. Nintendo had on its side Japanese stalwarts Square and Enix, which made Sega's conquest of Japan nigh-on impossible, but it had already proven itself to be hip and cool in the West, and this is where it succeeded. Sega was out earlier, priced cheaply, and provided both what people wanted, and what its rivals weren't supplying.

Everyone deep down knew the MD couldn't outperform the SNES; it was the underdog in terms of graphical and audio power (it had a faster processor though). Developers had to work harder to get great results. This extra effort, and dare it be said, love, that went into the games, was very apparent – when they came up wth a graphical trick, or something unique, it showed. The Genesis had more mature software and was also advertised on adult TV like *Saturday Night Live*, further cementing its reputation as "doing what Nintendon't." But the big tipping of scales was *Mortal Kombat*. Sega's version had blood and included all arcade fatalities; Nintendo's version didn't. The atmosphere at the time was electric, and *Mortal Kombat* was a deciding factor for many people's purchases.

By 1992 Sega had 55% control of the market (up from around 8%), and by 1993 it had more than quadrupled its net worth (up to $3.6 billion). Sega had reached its peak. But over the coming years it became like a leper, withering as its valuable bits fell off. The golden era ended, but if you look with the right kind of eyes, you can almost see the high water mark, where that glorious wave broke, and finally rolled back.

If forced to summarise why the MD is such a bloody fantastic slab of black plastic, it's because it's all things to all gamers. It appealed to hardcore elitist collectors, since it was great to import for. Plenty of action games (like *Alien Soldier*, and the explosively magnificent *Ranger X*), with sturdy boxes protecting beautiful Japanese cover-art. When SNES-owning friends had updates of Konami classics like *Contra* and *Castlevania*, MD owners were blessed with their own exclusive updates. They were no mere ports, but were designed from scratch, taking into account the hardware's limitations. And they were all the better because of this. There was no relying on vast colours or a custom Sony music chip; the gameplay had to be strong.

Importantly, it tapped in the mass market and appealed to families with low incomes. In impoverished areas in the USA it was popular among Black and Hispanic youths, who enjoyed the affordable easy-to-play arcade thrills provided. Children were also catered for, with both licensed and new IPs (*Quackshot* and *Toejam & Earl*). When the kids were tranquilised and asleep in bed, parents could indulge in a plethora of sports titles (*Madden* etc), violent brawlers (*Cyborg Justice*), or cerebral games like *Ecco*.

It was a system where much of the atmosphere and allure was born not only of the hardware and games, but the magazines, playground arguments, climate, and politics of the time. One of the most notable American magazines covering the system was GameFan, which, despite being multiformat, loved the Genesis. Its founder, Dave Halverson, understood, appreciated, and helped generate a lot buzz for Treasure too. GameFan praised their games, rightfully hyped up *Gunstar Heroes* to encourage sales, and were one of the very first English language magazines to conduct an interview with Treasure. Of course, not every multiformat magazine had quite the same views, which is why Edge infamously only gave *Gunstar Heroes* a half-page 6 out of 10 review. If you were an MD fan back in the early 1990s, Halverson's GameFan was the magazine you wanted to be reading!

We've not even yet mentioned subjects like the VR headset, Menacer Gun, Activator peripheral, *Virtua Racing*'s 3D graphics, pirate flash carts, Brazilian rock band Megadriver, Boris Vallejo, or the million-and-one related subjects. But it doesn't matter. Experiencing the system will tell you more than these words ever could.









» **Top and bottom:** [Mega Drive] *El Viento* and *Alisia Dragoon* are two very similar, very fun, and very Japanesey action-platformers.

» **Top and bottom**: [Mega Drive] Konami knew how to love Mega Drive owners: Insane hyper-exaggerated action in *Contra*, and classic vampire hunting in *Castlevania*.



» [Mega Drive] Every kid wants to rip his best friend's spine out. The uncensored Sega version shifted the tides between MD and SNES popularity.

SPECIAL THANKS TO
Many special thanks to www.sega-16.com, the best unofficial Mega Drive site online, for donating interview segments and images. Visit them for the full interviews! Thanks also to www.segagagadomain.com for images, Michael Katz for answering additional questions, and Sega's PR departments!







» [Mega Drive] There was certainly no shortage of exclusive, epic, and utterly essential action-RPGs: *Beyond Oasis* (1), *Soleil* (2), and *Landstalker* (3) are all must-haves!

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It's practically impossible to sum up the Mega Drive's best games as there were so many classics to choose from. If you are new to the machine, then these are some of the most important titles that you should consider adding to your collection



01

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SONIC TEAM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

01 **After the success of the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, it came as no surprise to see the lovable scamp returning a year later in a brand new adventure.** With a refined engine, the addition of Miles "Tails" Prowler, a greatly enhanced bonus stage and an excellent two-player mode, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is easily one of the hedgehog's most memorable 16-bit outings. While the core gameplay is little different to that seen in the original, Sonic Team threw in plenty of new touches to ensure that gamers wouldn't feel short-changed. The end result is not only one of the Mega Drive's greatest platformers, but quite possibly the hedgehog's finest hours on any system.

GUNSTAR HEROES

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** TREASURE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DYNAMITE HEADDY

02 **Outrageously good platformer/shooter that features dazzling graphics, a crazy relentless pace and dozens of fantastic boss encounters.** Created by a bunch of ex Konami staffers (you should all know the story by now) *Gunstar Heroes* does tricks with the Mega Drive's hardware that many thought impossible, and even today it has a freshness that belies its 13-year-old roots. While special mention must obviously go to the game's astounding visuals, Treasure also ensured that the gameplay was just as special and injected all manner of interesting play mechanics to ensure that every level remains as fresh as a proverbial daisy. If you're after a frenetic blaster then look no further. This is run-and-gun heaven.



02

DEVIL CRASH

- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THUNDER FORCE III

03 **There's a few pinball games on Sega's Mega Drive but this superb 1991 offering from Techno Soft remains a firm favourite.** While it only features one main table, it's well designed and boasts all manner of different bonuses that lead you to several smaller, mini-tables. While Techno Soft's previous pinball title *Alien Crush* featured an alien theme, *Devil Crash* has chortling knights, chanting monks and dragons occupying its tables. Released in the UK as *Dragon's Fury, Devil Crash* is a superb pinball game that should last you forever. Oh, and it's got one of the most rocking soundtracks we've ever heard.

STREETS OF RAGE 2

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** STREETS OF RAGE

04 **As with *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*, Sega took everything that made the original *Streets Of Rage* so fun to play and turned it up to 11.** The visuals have had an overhaul with all the heroes and enemies being beefed up and boasting greatly improved detail. Yuzo Koshiro is back with another thumping soundtrack and the game's many bosses are tougher than ever. Each character now has a selection of special moves and there are four different protagonists to choose from: Axel and Blaze from the original game and new boys Skate and Max. A magnificent scrolling fighter that's crying out for a next-gen remake.

STRIDER

- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** AFTER BURNER

05 **Oh come on, did you really think we'd do a Mega Drive top ten and not feature *Strider*?** Despite Darran's obsessive love for Capcom's purple clad ninja (it's a long sad story) *Strider*'s addition is easily justified, as it's quite simply the strongest arcade port on Sega's 16-bit console. Not only does it capture all the character of the coin-op classic, it goes one step further and delivers a stunning soundtrack that actually manages to improve on the arcade original. Sure there's a fair amount of flickering here and there but as far as capturing the essence of the original game goes no other Mega Drive conversion comes close. Essential.



03



04



05





06



07



08

DESERT STRIKE: RETURN TO THE GULF

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JUNGLE STRIKE

06 **Set a year after the events in the Gulf War, *Desert Strike* sees you climbing into an Apache and using it to stop a despot in the Middle East from starting World War III.** Utilising an isometric viewpoint, EA's blaster saw you storming into armed bases to rescue POWs, whilst using your firepower to take out anything that stood in your way. Despite the destruction you can cause, *Desert Strike* is quite a cerebral affair, with many of the later levels requiring a fair amount of strategy to complete. The thinking man's shoot-'em-up.

SHINOBI III: RETURN OF THE NINJA MASTER

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE REVENGE OF SHINOBI

07 **Despite a lengthy development period, *Shinobi III*'s four-year wait was worth it.** Not only has the pace been increased, your ninja now knows a selection of new skills. Flying-kicks, a running dash and using your hands to swing across ceilings are just a few of the new abilities you can use and all have been perfectly integrated into the game. There are even sections where you can ride horses or surf along the crest of a wave, dispensing bad guys as you go. If only the later games showed a tenth of the imagination of *Shinobi III*…

ECCO THE DOLPHIN

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** NOVOTRADE INTERNATIONAL
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** JAWS UNLEASHED

08 **Delightful underwater adventure that sees you trying to rescue your dolphin friends when they all get sucked up by a mysterious hurricane.** With its focus on exploring the expansive stages and its many devious puzzles, *Ecco The Dolphin* was quite unlike any other game at the time and instantly caught the public's attention. The underwater environments are full of detail and bursting with all sorts of exotic undersea creatures. Our only real complaints with *Ecco* is that some of the sections can be difficult to negotiate, ruining the otherwise tranquil atmosphere.



09

THUNDER FORCE IV

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** TECHNO SOFT
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** ALIEN CRUSH

09 **While *Thunder Force III* was never released in the UK, Sega atoned by releasing its superb sequel in 1993.** Techno Soft's fourth *Thunder Force* title (and the third to appear on the Mega Drive) boasted amazing visuals, over-the-top weaponry and a stunning soundtrack that perfectly complemented the frenetic on-screen action. As with *Thunder Force III*, the first four levels could be approached in any order, but the stages themselves were far larger in scope and featured both vertical and horizontal sections. Throw in some insanely tough bosses, plenty of exotic locations and those stunning visuals and you have one of the Mega Drive's classiest shooters.

SHINING FORCE II

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE

10 **While it essentially features the same combat system and gameplay mechanics as the original *Shining Force*, Sega's sequel is generally considered by many to be a far superior RPG.** Take the combat for example: it's a lot quicker now, making fights far less of a chore than before, and the new counter-attacks add a great degree of spice to the proceedings. The interaction of items is also better integrated with little touches like automatically passing a picked up item to another character when your main hero's pockets are full, and being able to view an item's stats before you buy them means that everything flows along rather nicely. A superb RPG that shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.



10









MEGA DRIVE

and the rest...

Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive is easily its greatest triumph and boasts a huge catalogue of fantastic games across a wide variety of genres. Don't believe us? Here's the proof

01 MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER
02 BUBSY THE BOBCAT
03 FANTASIA
04 SPACE HARRIER II
05 KLAX
06 ROAD RASH
07 AQUATIC GAMES
08 NSECTOR X
09 RAMBO III
10 CHAKAN THE FOREVER MAN
11 RISTAR
12 GHOSTBUSTERS
13 STRIDER
14 FLICKY
15 DJ BOY
16 VIRTUAL BART
17 ALTERED BEAST
18 GHOULS 'N GHOSTS
19 TETRIS
20 NHL HOCKEY 92
21 DARK CASTLE
22 PAC-MANIA
23 LETHAL ENFORCERS
24 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
25 STEEL EMPIRE
26 LEMMINGS
27 WARDNER
28 KID CHAMELEON
29 MORTAL KOMBAT II
30 STREETS OF RAGE II
31 HELLFIRE
32 BATTLETOADS
33 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
34 SPLATTERHOUSE 3
35 MEGAMAN: THE WILEY WARS
36 EARNEST EVANS
37 SHADOW DANCER
38 FANTASTIC DIZZY
39 MERCS
40 THE TERMINATOR
41 PGA TOUR GOLF
42 AEROBLASTERS
43 ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES
44 TOY STORY
45 THE GADGET TWINS
46 REVENGE OF SHINOBI
47 MICRO MACHINES 96
48 TOEJAM & EARL
49 JAMES POND
50 RAINBOW ISLANDS
51 AFTER BURNER
52 CASTLE OF ILLUSION
53 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
54 STREETS OF RAGE
55 TURBO OUTRUN
56 GAIN GROUND
57 PHANTASY STAR IV
58 GOLDEN AXE
59 CANNON FODDER
60 ECCO THE DOLPHIN
61 FLASHBACK
62 ALADDIN
63 TRUXTON
64 COLUMNS
65 WORLD OF ILLUSION
66 SPEEDBALL 2
67 THE JUNGLE BOOK
68 WONDERBOY III
69 THUNDER FORCE III
70 AIR DIVER
71 ULTIMATE QIX
72 DEVIL CRASH
73 BATMAN
74 DECAP ATTACK
75 GYNOUG
76 URBAN STRIKE
77 OUTRUN
78 RED ZONE
79 ALIEN 3
80 GAUNTLET IV: THE FINAL ENCOUNTER
81 SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
82 THE IMMORTAL
83 NBA JAM
84 QUACKSHOT
85 GUNSTAR HEROES
86 CASTLEVANIA: THE NEXT GENERATION
87 THUNDER FORCE IV



































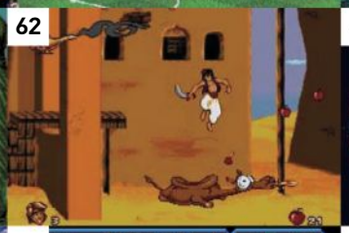

































05
KLAXS


06
PLAYER 8
VIPER


07


08
SCORE
TOP


09


11


12


13


14


15
SCORE
ROUND


20


21


22


23
1P 000110
CREDIT
02
2P


24
SCORE
TIME
RINGS


FIGHT!!


30


31


32


33


38


39
SCORE
TIME
188
LIFE


40


41
Wind
12 mph


42
10200


47


48


49
45 2 4 0002320


50
SCORE
HIGH SCORE


51
SCORE
HI


56
EXIT


57
This is your first job since you joined the Hunters Guild.


58
STAGE
MAGIC


59


60


65


66


67
7420


68
3950


69
TOP SCORE

74
USE THE CURSOR TO CHOOSE AN ITEM.

75

76

77
TIME
SCORE
LOOP
STAGE

78
Rocket

83

84

85

86

87
TWIN SHOT

MEGA

MANY GAMERS ASSOCIATE THE NAME 'MEGA-CD' WITH 'ABJECT FAILURE', BUT OTHERS BELIEVE THE PLATFORM'S ONLY FAILING WAS TO BRING CD-ROM TECHNOLOGY TO THE PARTY A GENERATION TOO SOON. DAMIEN MCFERRAN CELEBRATES A TIME WHEN SEGA WASN'T AFRAID TO TAKE MASSIVE RISKS IN THE HARDWARE ARENA

INSTANT EXPERT

- **Some later Mega** CD games were coded to make use of the additional power of the ill-fated 32X add-on – when fully assembled, this hardware setup was quite a beast and required three different power supplies.
- **The Mega-CD** was also able to play the CD-G+, a format used mainly to display karaoke lyrics on screen – a karaoke add-on was also produced for the system.
- **Digital Picture's** *Sewer Shark* and *Night Trap* were going to be released on the Super Nintendo CD-ROM system – when this was cancelled, a deal was signed to bring them to Mega-CD.
- **All Mega-CD** games carry a region lockout system. This can be circumvented by chipping the machine or purchasing a converter cartridge (such as Datel's CDX) that slots into the Mega Drive's cartridge port.
- **The Ricoh RF5C164** sound chip is one of the machine's greatest assets and grants an additional eight channels of sound, all of which can be used to play samples.
- **Game saves were** recorded to the Mega CD's internal RAM; it was also possible to purchase a RAM cartridge that would offer even more space. Some games – such as *Shining Force* CD – required so much memory to save a game that these carts were almost essential.
- **The Mega Drive** and Mega-CD both feature the same 16-bit Motorola 68000 CPU, but the one present in the Mega-CD has a clock speed almost twice as fast.
- **Notable 'pack-in' games** included *Road Avenger, Sol-Feace, Cobra Command* and *Sega Arcade Classics*, which featured several popular Mega Drive games such as *Golden Axe* and *Revenge Of Shinobi*.
- **Titles such as** *Ernest Evans* and *Sol-Feace* were later released on the Mega Drive, with only the CD audio and cut-scenes missing.
- **Rapper-turned-thespian** Mark Wahlberg can count himself as a Mega-CD star – he appeared in *Marky Mark: Make My Video*, which allowed players to edit three of the Funky Bunch's songs.

They say that pride comes before a fall but as the first broadsides of the 16-bit war were unleashed at the dawn of the Nineties, Sega certainly had plenty to feel proud about. The launch of the Mega Drive (rebranded 'Genesis' in the US) had transformed the company from plucky also-ran to industry leader virtually overnight; the hitherto unchallenged dominance of Nintendo's 8-bit NES was broken and by the time 1992 arrived Sega was able to call 50 per cent of the American home console market its own.

It was during this exciting period in Sega's history that Scot Bayless joined the company. He vividly remembers what it was like to work for Sega at its peak: "It was exhilarating; we were running about 50 per cent on sheer bravado. One of the great things about Sega in those days was the company's willingness to just try stuff. We had a T-shirt made with the slogan 'This may not work, but what the hell' – that was pretty much our attitude." Such joyous ebullience imbued Sega with the confidence to experiment with new technology – and in this case, it was the medium of CD-ROM that intrigued the Japanese firm.

Coming straight from Spectrum Holobyte (where he worked on the epic air combat flight simulator *Falcon 3.0*) Bayless took the position of Technical Director at Sega of America and was ultimately put in charge of overseeing the US debut of Sega's latest piece of hardware – the Mega-CD. It wasn't the first company to embrace the possibilities of the shiny plastic disc – rival NEC had produced its own CD-ROM add-on for the 8-bit PC Engine in 1988 – but with the Sega brand in the ascendancy and the war between the Mega Drive and Nintendo's SNES about to go global, all eyes were on this latest system and the new era of technological brilliance it was about to usher in. "Sega of Japan was already well along the road and the first development kits showed up not long after I did," reveals Bayless. "My first responsibility was to help get the first demos ready for the big announcement event in New York."

The machine had been conceived by Sega's top hardware team in Japan, but so fearful was the company of internal leaks that it had been intentionally slow to provide Sega of America with vital technical information relating to the project. This clandestine attitude meant that Bayless and his team had to work overtime to get things ready for the US launch, which was scheduled for 1992. "At that point there were virtually no software tools – only barely functional dev kits and incomplete documents that were being translated more slowly than they were being revised," he remembers. "There was one stretch where I spent four continuous days in the building – as in didn't actually leave the premises. I lived off vending machines and coffee while I slogged through a bunch of systems code, trying to get the demos to function reliably."

Because the hardware development was being done exclusively by Sega's Japanese team, Bayless decided early on that it was vital that he familiarise himself with the new machine. "One of the first things I did was to go to Tokyo and get up to speed on the hardware," he recalls. With the relevant tools in place, Bayless and his US team were able to start tinkering around with the console, and it didn't take long for potential problems to arise. "The big headline was that there was a second CPU with its own memory – that was the good news," he says. "The bad news was that the data path between

Year released: Japan: 1991 USA: 1992 UK: 1993

Original price: Japan: 49,800 Yen USA: $300 UK: £270

Buy it now for: £30+ ($50+)

Associated magazines: *Megatech, Mean Machines Sega, Sega Power, Sega Pro, Mega*

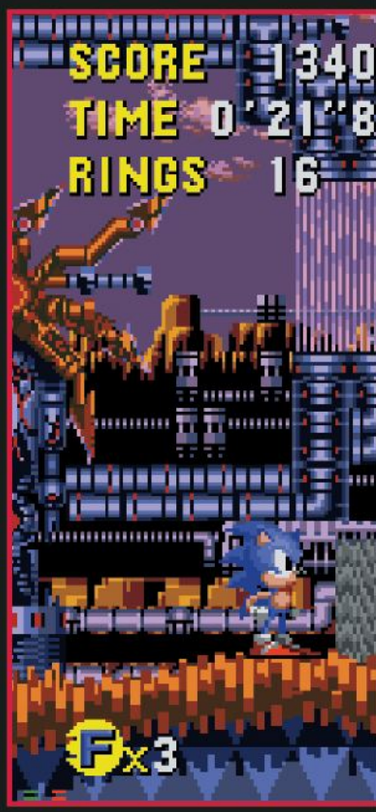
Why the Mega-CD was great…
For many gamers it was their first glimpse of the raw potential offered by the CD-ROM format, and while it wasn't the success that Sega might have hoped for, you can't deny that the Mega-CD was privy to some wonderful games. Plus the 'Mark 1' Mega Drive and Mega-CD combi is one of the sexiest hardware setups in the history of consoles – fact.



A-CD


16-BIT
POWER
ON
OFF
POWER
RESET
MEGA DRIVE
SEGA
CONTROL 1
CONTROL 2
MEGA-CD
SEGA
READY
COMPACT
disc
ACCESS
CD ACCESS
CD IN
CD OUT
STAND-BY MODE





COMMUNITY MEGA-CD SITES TO WATCH

PAL Sega Mega-CD Library
http://www.sega-mega-cd-library.co.uk
If you're thinking of collecting every single PAL Mega-CD release then this site is an essential resource. It contains an exhaustive collection of Mega-CD info, including details about games that never made it and how to emulate the Mega-CD on your PC.

Eidolons Inn
http://www.eidolons-inn.net/tiki-index.php?page=SegaBase
Although it's not specifically aimed at covering the Mega-CD, SegaBase is one of the longest running Sega resources on the net and is home to an excellent piece on the history of the Mega-CD.

Sega-16.com
http://www.sega-16.com/
Another long-running Sega fan site, Sega-16 is incredibly professional and a joy to navigate. It houses loads of Mega-CD reviews as well as some intriguing features regarding Sega's history. It's all too easy to get hopelessly lost in this excellent site.

Sega Memories
http://sega-memories.blogspot.com/
If your rose-tinted specs have a pronounced 'blue' hue to them then this site will float your boat. Again, it's not expressly aimed at covering the Mega-CD but the sheer volume of Sega nostalgia is guaranteed to strike a cord with fans of the machine.









the Mega Drive and the Mega-CD was very limited. What really stood out was the machine's ability to store (for that time) ridiculous amounts of data; the real challenge was figuring out what to do with all that storage. Given the tools of the time, the human cost of building that much content was prohibitive, so people started looking at other possibilities. Probably the most promising element of the hardware was the sound system; it hugely enhanced the sound capabilities of the system of the Mega Drive. But, short of just playing back Red Book audio, nothing really interesting got done with that lovely hardware."



Of course, Bayless couldn't go public with his concerns; Nintendo was gearing up for the launch of the Super Nintendo and as a result Sega was putting a lot of effort into making the Mega-CD a success. However, even when he tried to talk up the power of the console, it didn't always work out as expected. Take the infamous 'Blast Processing' boast, for example. "Sadly I have to take responsibility for that ghastly phrase," admits Bayless with a grimace. "One of our programmers called Marty Franz discovered that you could do this nifty trick by hooking the scan line interrupt and firing off a Direct Memory Access at just the right time. The result was that you could effectively jam data onto the graphics chip while the scan line was being drawn – which meant you could drive the Digital-to-Analogue Converters with 8 bits per pixel. Assuming you could get the timing just right, you could effectively draw 256 colour static images. There were all kinds of subtleties to the timing and the trick didn't work reliably on all iterations of the hardware, but you could do it and it was cool as heck. So during the run-up to the Western launch of Mega-CD the PR guys interviewed me about what made the platform interesting from a technical standpoint and somewhere in there I mentioned the fact that you could just 'blast data into the DACs'. They loved the word 'blast' and the next thing I knew 'Blast Processing' was born."

Tinkering around with new technology was undeniably fun but not having any input into the actual development of the machine was frustrating for Bayless and his team at Sega of America. However, as fate would have it, they were able to pitch in with critical assistance from time to time. "There was one technical issue that we did a pretty good job of coping with before it got onto consumers' radar," remembers Bayless. "The CD drive Sega of Japan chose was, predictably, an inexpensive single speed consumer CD drive. What nobody stopped to think about was how that drive would get used by those early FMV games. I got this frantic call one day from the Quality Assurance guys; they were using retail Mega-CDs – the same ones queuing up to be sold to consumers – for final QA, and they were suddenly experiencing an insane hardware failure rate. Units were burning up in droves; in fact, a few of them had literally caught fire as they died. We were in the big push toward launch and the whole place was in a panic because QA was out of hardware on which to test games. It was like an episode of *House*; the patient was doomed but nobody could figure out why. About all we knew was that the systems started flaming out when the FMV-based titles were being tested by QA. All of those games used some form of multi-stream video technique, which meant they were constantly seeking the read head in the drive. What



» **[Mega Cd]** *Sonic CD* was easily the Mega-CD's most sucessful platformer. It's still superb fun.







finally tipped me off was an obscure manufacturer's specification for the CD drive; it was rated for a five per cent duty cycle – which means that they were expecting that no more than five per cent of the time would the drive be seeking from one track to another. It was built for people who wanted to play music CDs and, of course, you rarely seek between tracks more than once every few minutes, so five per cent was way more than they'd ever expected people to need. What nobody anticipated was a multi-stream FMV videogame seeking 75 per cent of the time – or more. We were literally cooking the motors that moved the heads." Bayless had identified the problem in the nick of time and ultimately saved Sega from suffering a potentially catastrophic PR blunder.

Despite these setbacks, the allure of CD-ROM technology – coupled with Sega's recently elevated status within the videogame industry – meant that hype for the Mega-CD grew exponentially as the launch drew ever closer. As a result, Bayless found himself receiving phone calls from somewhat unexpected quarters. "I remember I was sitting in my office one day tinkering with some low level code when the phone rang," he recalls. "This sexy female voice said, 'Is this Scot Bayless?' I said, 'Yes,' and she replied, 'This is David Bowie's office. Can you please hold?' It turned out it was Bowie's manager, a very cool guy named Bob Goodale. Bowie was completely jazzed about the potential of Mega-CD as a window for music into games." The artist formerly known as The Thin White Duke wasn't the only musician to take interest in the aural capabilities of the Sega's new baby. "I had the bizarre meeting with Michael Jackson around the same time," Bayless remembers. "He'd already signed the *Moonwalker* deal with Sega and they were touring him around the Redwood City studio. I spent about half an hour showing him all kinds of techie stuff we were doing and not once did he ever comment or even make eye contact; he just kind of stood there with about 15 of his minions hovering around him. When we finished there we walked him over to the sound studio, which was just down the hall. Suddenly there was this new person in the room; it was uncanny. Jackson came to life like someone had flipped a switch. It was obvious that the only thing he was excited about was the music."

The Japanese launch of the Mega-CD took place in December 1991. Units flew off the shelves despite the high retail price of ¥49,800, but the relatively small installed base of the Mega Drive in that region meant that sales soon dipped. Sega knew that the US launch was far more important, given the strength of the Genesis. It took place almost a year later (with the machine being re-christened 'Sega-CD') and although the public was ravenous for this new add-on, production issues meant that a paltry 50,000 units were made available to American retailers. Like Japan, the price was bordering on the prohibitive but Sega's lofty standing Stateside helped the company quickly sell through what limited stock it had; by the time 1992 drew to a close, 200,000 units had found their way into US gamers' homes. Likewise, 60,000 of the 70,000 machines made available for the UK release the following spring were snapped up before August. It was a positive start, but it wasn't to last.

> **"A few units had caught fire as they died"**
> SCOT BAYLESS ON INITIAL PROBLEMS

With the Super NES and Genesis/Mega Drive locked in deadly combat, Sega of America decided to brandish the Mega-CD as a unique weapon in the

» SIMS' *Vay* was picked up for Western release by Working Designs but failed to make the same impact as *Lunar.* It was given a new lease of life on Apple's iPhone.



VERSIONS SOME OF THE BEST



Mega CD MK II

Introduced in order to bring down costs, the Mk II model is smaller than the original and lacks the motorised CD tray and function lights. It's also a lot less sexy than the previous model, but in its favour it takes up less room and is more reliable.



Wondermega

JVC decided it wanted a bite of the Mega-CD cherry and produced this sleek, all-in-one unit. MIDI and karaoke options were included and the hybrid console was even released Stateside as the X'Eye, although sales were disappointing.



Multi-Mega

The Multi-Mega was little bigger than a portable CD player (it could even be used as such and was powered by two AA batteries for audio playback) but the price was bordering on the insane – UK gamers were expected to shell out £500 for it.



Aiwa CSD-GM1

Perhaps the rarest of all the Mega-CD systems, this Mega Drive/Mega-CD combo looks very much like a traditional boom box. It was produced in limited numbers and only saw distribution in Asia, and as a result it is almost impossible to track down these days.



» Renamed the CDX in the US, the Multi-Mega fused the Mega Drive and Mega-CD into one package – but at £500 in the UK, the pricing was way off.



» Sega focused on promoting the machine's unique FMV-based games, but people soon realised that this gaming revolution was a false dawn of epic proportions.





» **[Mega CD]** *Jurassic Park CD* was a massive undertaking for Sega's newly-founded multimedia studio, but with Scot Bayless's guidance, it was pretty decent.



fight against rival Nintendo. A dedicated multimedia studio was established within the company's Californian headquarters at great expense in order to produce top-quality content with which to fill the Mega-CD's shiny discs. "It was a pretty cool place and Sega was willing to invest a lot of money in making it a showpiece," explains Bayless. "The art team was buying SGI Indigo work stations for about $50K per seat, including a copy of SoftImage, and the sound studio was a showcase of sparkly new technology. It was impressive."

> **"Could Guitar Hero have gone on Mega-CD? Hell yes"** SCOT BAYLESS

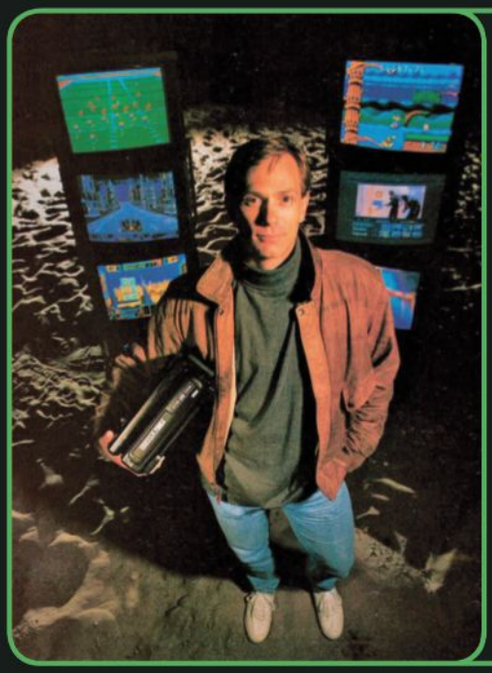
The first project assigned to this new studio couldn't have been any more high profile; Sega had secured the *Jurassic Park* licence and was keen to produce a game that demonstrated the Hollywood aspirations of the Mega-CD technology. "The *Jurassic Park* project was a huge priority for Sega, mainly because the association with Steven Spielberg was seen as so important to the PR campaign," recalls Bayless. "Every resource you can imagine was made available. Kathy Kennedy, producer on the film and one of Steven's longest standing collaborators, went way out of her way to help Sega. She opened doors to everything from Phil Tippet's early stop-motion dinosaur studies to concept art from Stan Winston's team to the CG models used for the film. I remember one day this package arrived from Amblin with a cassette tape inside; the only thing on the tape was take after take of Wayne Knight gurgling out his death rattles from the scene with the Dilophosaurs – they really did give us everything." Despite this intense focus, the project endured a torrid development period. "Fast forward about six months and I get this phone call at about 2am from our studio head in Tokyo, who was meeting with the Sega of Japan execs," explains Bayless. "He said, 'I just showed Hayao Nakayama [Sega's CEO at the time] a build of *Jurassic Park*. As of right now, you're in charge of the project. Do whatever you have to do to get it back on the rails.' So I rolled up my sleeves, fired some people and eventually shipped a pretty decent game."

As *Jurassic Park* proves, the advent of CD-ROM technology brought with it amazing potential, but there were less welcome side-effects, too. "*Jurassic Park* represented the transition from the small budgets and tiny teams of the old days to something much more expensive and demanding of real production discipline," says Bayless. "When you're building a game that has to fit into a few megabytes of ROM, it's not inconceivable that you can keep the whole project in your head. But when you're making something that requires a dozen CG animators, casting calls,

location shoots, ADR and Foley sessions, you can't afford to do anything without a plan. I remember that before I took over the *Jurassic Park* project, a team went romping off to Hawaii where they hired a steadicam and spent a week running around in the jungle taking hours of video of palm trees whizzing by. If you look at the finished game, maybe a total of two minutes of that footage survived the project. The rest was worthless, but it cost maybe $20K to get it."

Cash continued to be poured into Mega-CD development and for a time hardware sales were encouraging, but by this point Nintendo had stepped up its game and the SNES was rapidly asserting itself in the West. The once insatiable public interest in Sega's CD-based machine began to wane and the previously 'innovative' tech began to appear stale. This process was aided by the fact that one of the console's key selling points – FMV-based gaming – was something of a non-starter. "Sega got way too focused on FMV," admits Bayless. "There was all this talk going around about games converging with movies and Mega-CD being the gateway to that convergence. Suddenly game guys were thinking of themselves as movie makers. But if you really looked at how that translated into an entertainment experience it didn't take a rocket scientist to realise that the things Mega-CD could do well really had very little to do with movies." As the Nineties progressed, rival CD-ROM-based consoles emerged; while they could hardly be classed as tremendous successes themselves, the arrival of the CD-i and 3DO essentially made the Mega-CD technically obsolete. The failure of the machine was followed by the abortive 32X project ("I was present at the inception of 32X and it was literally designed on a cocktail napkin," reveals Bayless with a laugh) and Sega's previously soaring reputation was left in tatters. To say that Sega's slide began with the release of the Mega-CD is probably doing the machine an injustice, but the high-profile collapse of the format certainly didn't help the company's public image.

It's all too easy to be overly negative when looking back on the Mega-CD, but it's often forgotten that the platform boasted some truly brilliant games. Sega's conversion of Capcom's *Final Fight* was a definite highlight, offering all three characters and a two-player mode (both famously absent from the SNES port), and Working Designs localised Japanese RPGs such as *Lunar: The Silver Star*, *Lunar: Eternal Blue* and *Vay*, making themselves heroes with English-speaking Sega fans in the process. But what does Bayless consider to be the best titles for the system? "For polished gameplay, *Sonic CD*, hands down. For the best soundtrack, *Ecco CD*. For the best use of the platform, I'd have to go with Kojima's *Snatcher*."



LIFE'S A BEACH

Bayless may have been instrumental 'behind the scenes' at Sega of America but thanks to a famous American magazine advert, he also became the visible 'face' of the Mega-CD to many gamers. He was featured on a double-page spread where he extolled the virtues of Sega's latest system, and the promotion was printed in leading US magazines such as *GamePro* and *EGM*. "That shot was taken on Stinson Beach just north of San Francisco," recalls Bayless when questioned about his brush with superstardom. "The agency had hired some very high profile photographer to do the shoot and his vision was to put that wall of TVs in front of the setting sun with me in the foreground. So there we were, on the beach with him on a ladder and the two of us surrounded by a herd of people and gear. The agency guys are there sitting in director's chairs like directors on a movie set. They're moving stuff around, restacking the TVs, testing low angles, testing high angles. They're facing the sun. They're facing away from the sun. They're sending people into the city to buy me clothes because the photographer wants to try out new outfits – I changed about six times during the course of the afternoon with people holding up blankets while I stripped. At the end, the only thing I was wearing that was actually mine was my shoes. Meanwhile, there are all these people walking by on the beach asking if I'm someone famous and, of course, while all this is going on the sun is going down. Finally, they start shooting at like 7pm, but by then the sun was gone. So when it's all done you have a shot they could have done on a sound stage with a couple of buckets full of sand. But hey, for about seven hours I got to be a movie star!"

Plenty of theories have emerged as to why the Mega-CD failed to make a significant impact on the world of videogames; it's been argued that the price was too high, the inability to function without a Mega Drive limited its sales potential and the technology involved simply wasn't powerful enough to convince people to upgrade. Bayless has his own verdict. "What turned out to be problematic was the content," he explains. "Personally I don't think the platform ever really demonstrated successfully what the value proposition was. A few years later Sony very successfully positioned the PS2 as a competitively priced DVD player that also happened to offer a great gaming experience. The Mega-CD might have been able to play a similar gambit but that was never part of the plan. However, there was a deeper issue; it was fundamentally a solution in search of a problem. I remember sitting in lengthy head-scratching sessions – not just at Sega of America but at Sega of Japan as well – where we were saying to each other, 'Great, so now we have a storage system that's 100 times bigger than before. So what?' Worse still, access to all that data was 100 times *slower*. It was a fundamental paradigm shift with almost no thought given to consequences. I honestly don't think anyone at Sega asked the most important question: 'Why?' There's a rule I developed during my time as an engineer in the military aviation business: never fall in love with your tech. I think that's where Mega-CD went off the rails. The whole company fell in love with the idea without ever really asking how it would affect the games you made."



» [Mega CD] *Night Trap* went on to become something of a 'video nasty' and sparked an age rating classification scandal upon its release in the US and Europe.

When asked what could have been done to improve the Mega-CD's chances, Bayless recounts an interesting anecdote that is made all the more ironic given the game industry's current preoccupation with music games. "Record producer Todd Rundgren showed up at the studio one day, pitching something that was like the pre-biotic version of *Guitar Hero*," recalls Bayless. "He wasn't all the way there but he was poking in the right direction. Sadly we were all too caught up in our own skewed vision to really understand him or what could have been done with his embryonic ideas. Could *Guitar Hero* have been done on Mega-CD? Hell yes. Would that have transformed the business and saved Mega-CD? Who knows, but I bet it would have made a splash."



MEGA-CD



PERFECT TEN GAMES

It's easy to laugh at Sega's Mega-CD, but to do so would be rather foolish. Despite it's poor sales and the numerous problems Sega faced while making it, plenty of great games were available for the system. The following examples are the very best, representing a wide range of different genres that still hold up today



01

SONIC CD

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

01 **Every console needs** a killer app to justify its existence, and *Sonic CD* is as close as you're going to get on the Mega-CD. Regularly cited as one of the best games in the series, this ambitious title made good use of the CD format's storage potential by including gigantic levels, Mode 7 bonus stages and a spectacular soundtrack. The game was made even deeper by the fact it was possible to time-travel forwards and backwards on each level, essentially making the stages three times as big. Interestingly, the US version features a completely different soundtrack to the Japanese and European variants – although both selections of songs are equally fantastic.

FINAL FIGHT CD

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SEGA/CAPCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SPIDER-MAN VS. THE KINGPIN

02 **When *Final Fight*** (unquestionably the quintessential arcade hit of the late Eighties) was ported to Nintendo's Super Famicom in 1990, you could practically hear the cries of despair emanating from Sega fans the world over. For a time it seemed as if this Capcom classic would remain exclusive to Nintendo, but thankfully Sega was granted permission to reprogram the game when the Mega-CD came along – it produced what is arguably the best home console conversion (aside from recent emulated ports). *Final Fight CD* is packed with all three characters and all the levels. Needless to say, the previously smug SNES owners were left feeling a little put out.



02

SHINING FORCE CD

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **CREATED BY:** SONIC SOFTWARE PLANNING
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHINING FORCE GAIDEN (GAME GEAR)

03 **The only *Shining Force*** game to make its way onto the Mega-CD is a combined remake of the Game Gear releases *Shining Force Gaiden* and *Shining Force Gaiden 2: Sword Of Hajya*. Visually it's not what you could call a massive improvement when compared to the Mega Drive instalments, but the sheer scope of the challenge is almost overwhelming. So epic was the quest that the Mega-CD internal save game RAM wasn't enough to contain all the data; the purchase of a separate RAM cart was essential if you wanted to see everything the game had to offer.

LUNAR: THE SILVER STAR

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** GAME ARTS/STUDIO ALEX
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SILPHEED

04 **Game Art's epic** RPG was the closest the Mega-CD ever got to having its own *Final Fantasy*, and following its Japanese release, the console's sales in that region were given a boost. Although the in-game graphics were hardly ground-breaking, they were accompanied by some lush anime sequences and an astounding soundtrack by Noriyuki Iwadare. US firm Working Designs picked *Lunar* up for Western localisation and did a fantastic job – the company later returned to the game when it was remade for the PSone in 1996.

THUNDERHAWK

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHER:** CORE DESIGN
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CHUCK ROCK

05 **UK-based Core** Design was a staunch Sega supporter and produced some of the Mega-CD's finest moments. While games such as *Battlecorps* and *BC Racers* pushed the hardware but fell a little short on enjoyment, *Thunderhawk* was a complete success in both regards. Smooth Mode 7 rotation and scaling was coupled effectively with some of the most frantic action ever witnessed on the format, and the game was rightly praised by the press upon release. A 32-bit sequel followed that added full 3D visuals, but the original remains the one we're most fond of.


03


04


05

SPECIAL THANKS TO GENERATION-MSX.NL FOR ADDITIONAL SCREENS







06



07



08

LUNAR: ETERNAL BLUE

- **RELEASED:** 1994 (JAPAN)
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** GAME ARTS/STUDIO ALEX
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** TENKA FUBU

06 **Although it doesn't** attract as much praise as its predecessor, *Lunar: Eternal Blue* is just as enjoyable an RPG experience as *The Silver Star*. Also, despite featuring a new cast of protagonists, the gameplay remains largely unchanged. Again, Working Designs took the plunge and brought this Stateside with a great translation. In both Japan and the US, this was one of the final high-profile pieces of software for the ailing platform; by the time of the American launch the system was all but dead.

POPFUL MAIL

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** WORKING DESIGNS (US)
- **CREATED BY:** FALCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** YS

07 **Originally produced for** the NEC PC-8801 in 1991, this 2D action RPG title shares many similarities with the *Wonderboy: Monster World* series. The player takes on the role of a bounty hunter named Mail, but it's possible to switch to other characters. With the excellent English translation and voice work, the Western version of *Popful Mail* is arguably the best of all the conversions and carries a justifiably inflated price tag when it appears on auction sites today. While we're not fans of unscrupulous game resellers, *Popful Mail* is unquestionably worth paying through the nose for.

ROBO ALESTE

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHER:** TENGEN
- **CREATED BY:** COMPILE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHADOWRUN

08 **A spiritual sequel** to the shockingly brilliant Mega Drive shooter *MUSHA Aleste*, *Robo Aleste* featured the same fixation with large mecha as its predecessor, but was unique because it placed these mechanical killing machines in feudal Japan. Although the gameplay doesn't really present any ideas that couldn't have been achieved on the good old Mega Drive, the music and cut-scenes genuinely elevate the game to a new level of greatness. The game saw release in all three key territories and is in high demand thanks to its overall quality.



09

SNATCHER

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** LETHAL ENFORCERS

09 **It's ironic that** while many developers wrestled in vain with grainy, low quality FMV to create the ultimate interactive movie, *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima succeeded where others had failed – by using traditional hand-drawn 2D visuals. Showcasing a plot that owes more than little debt to the likes of Hollywood movies such as *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*, *Snatcher* remains one of Kojima's most beloved works. It was also released on the PC Engine CD-ROM, PlayStation and Saturn, but the Mega-CD outing remains the only version to be officially translated into English. This makes it a highly sought-after title. You need this game, but your bank balance won't thank you.

KEIO FLYING SQUADRON

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** JVC/VICTOR
- **CREATED BY:** IN-HOUSE
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FUNKY HORROR BAND

10 **The Mega Drive** and Mega-CD were never gifted with a conversion of Konami's deliriously playable *Parodius*, but JVC's *Keio Flying Squadron* is a perfectly acceptable substitute. Putting the player in the high-heeled shoes of a girl dressed in what looks like a Playboy bunny outfit, *Keio* boasts a similar style of horizontally scrolling wackiness and puts the Mega-CD hardware to good use to produce some excellent cut-scenes and a brilliant CD-quality soundtrack. A Saturn sequel followed in 1996 that added 2D platforming sections, but for pure shooting brilliance the Mega-CD original is where it's at. A relatively late release, the PAL version of *Keio* is common and reasonably priced.



10

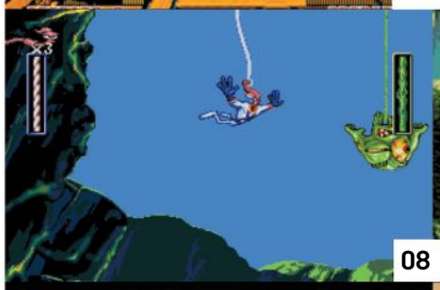


MEGA-CD and the rest...

FMV flop or 16-bit wonder? Regardless of your viewpoint Sega's Mega-CD still has plenty of games that are worth seeking out. Here are some of the best and worst

































01 SAMURAI SHODOWN
02 ECCO THE DOLPHIN: THE TIDES OF TIME
03 BRUTAL: PAWS OF FURY
04 HEART OF THE ALIEN
05 MORTAL KOMBAT
06 SPACE ACE
07 AFTER BURNER III
08 EARTHWORM JIM: SPECIAL EDITION
09 FLASHBACK: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY
10 PRINCE OF PERSIA
11 SEWER SHARK
12 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
13 THE ADVENTURES OF WILLY BEAMISH
14 LETHAL ENFORCERS
15 ROAD AVENGER
16 JAGUAR XJ220
17 BATMAN RETURNS
18 COBRA COMMAND
19 HEIMDALL
20 PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE
21 SHADOW OF THE BEAST II
22 IRON HELIX
23 CHUCK ROCK
24 THE NINJA WARRIORS
25 WILD WOODY
26 BLACK HOLE ASSAULT
27 DOUBLE SWITCH
28 FATAL FURY SPECIAL
29 FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER
30 MICROCOSM
31 SILPHEED
32 HOOK
33 GROUND ZERO TEXAS
34 TOMCAT ALLEY
35 NIGHT TRAP
36 BC RACERS
37 CRIME PATROL
38 JURASSIC PARK
39 NBA JAM
40 BATTLECORPS
41 RACING ACES
42 SENSIBLE SOCCER
43 WINDS OF THUNDER
44 ETERNAL CHAMPIONS
45 CITIZEN X
46 WHO SHOT JOHNNY ROCK?
47 STAR WARS: REBEL ASSAULT
48 DUNGEON MASTER II: SKULLKEEP
49 MAD DOG MCCREE
50 THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
51 DARK WIZARD
52 SOL-FEACE
53 THE LAWNMOWER MAN
54 WOLFCHILD
55 BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA
56 SOULSTAR



04 05





06



07



11 12





13



14



18 19





20



21



25 26





27



28





32 33



34



35





39 40



41



42

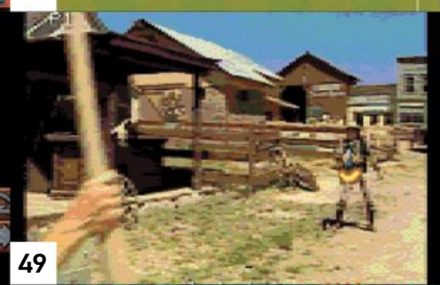




46 47



48



49





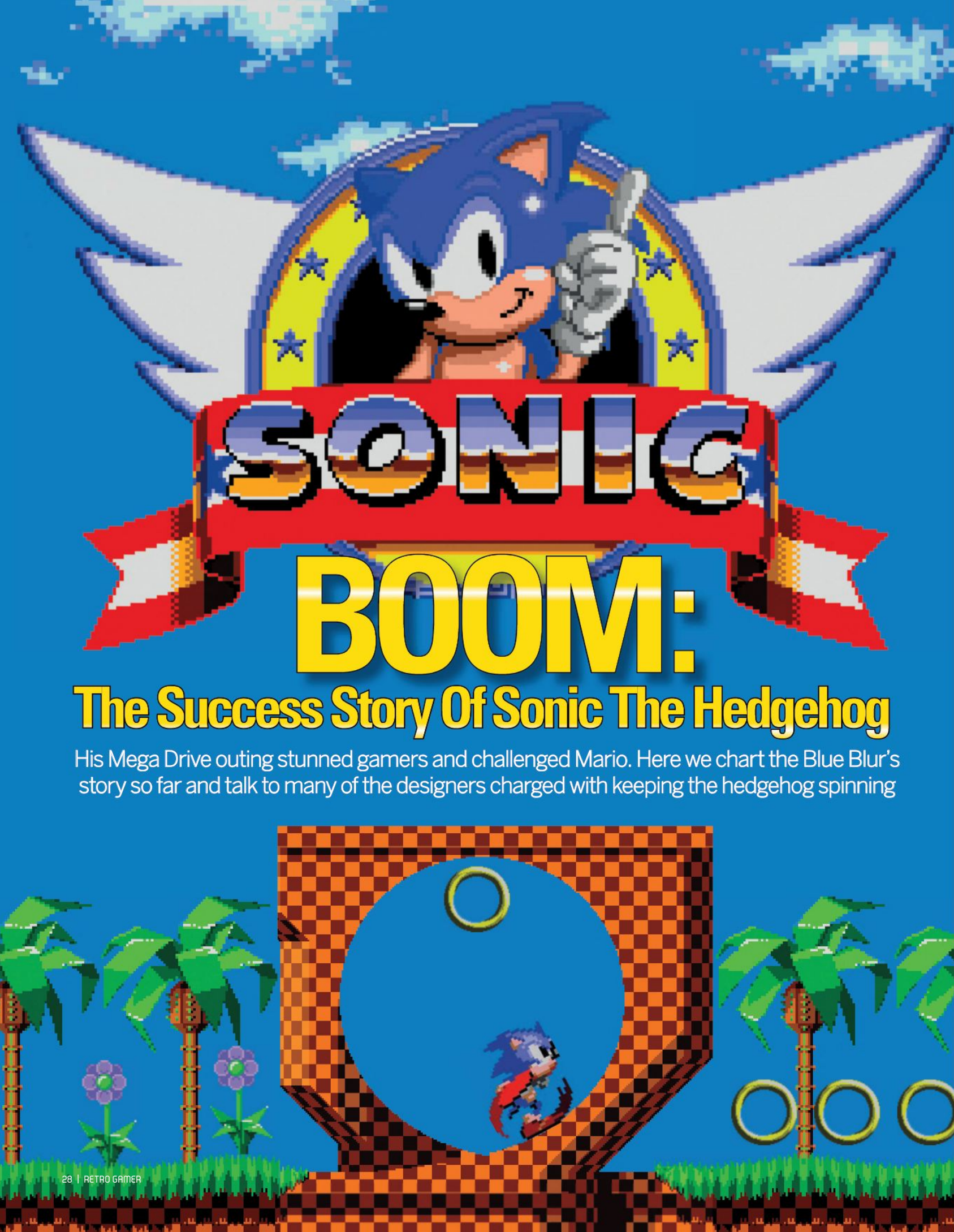
53 54



55



56



BOOM:

The Success Story Of Sonic The Hedgehog

His Mega Drive outing stunned gamers and challenged Mario. Here we chart the Blue Blur's story so far and talk to many of the designers charged with keeping the hedgehog spinning

Is it possible to write a history of Sonic without mentioning Mario? In theory, but you'd be foolish to try. Though created a decade later, Sonic's existence hinges on that of Mario, and the two have been rivals ever since. Sonic's history is therefore also Mario's, and even platform games as a whole.

The sheer brilliance of *Super Mario Bros* put a Nintendo Entertainment System into more than 60 million homes worldwide, while Sega's 8-bit equivalent, the Master System, had to make do with just 13 million. There are several reasons for this disparity, of course, but Mario was one of the biggest reasons and Sega knew it. Launching its 16-bit system, the Mega Drive, in 1988, Sega had a two-year head start on the Super Famicom/SNES, but even with such an advantage it struggled to keep up with the ageing NES.

Sega's expertise, right through the Eighties and beyond, focused on its coin-op games. This was where Sega ruled videogames, its comfort zone, and the company certainly managed to attract a sizeable fan base just by being able to convert its greatest hits to the home. But the tastes of console gamers gradually shifted throughout the mid to late Eighties. NES games like *Super Mario Bros*, *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Mega Man*, *Castlevania* and *Final Fantasy* represented a shift away from the instant gratification of the arcades and towards a more protracted experience that gamers could spend hours, days and weeks absorbed in.

Sega remained extremely successful in the arcades, of course, so its home conversions also remained a core part of its business, especially since they were relatively cheap to produce and sold in large enough numbers. But the Master System and Mega Drive needed original games, unconnected to the coin-ops. These came slowly but surely. Games like *Phantasy Star* and *Streets Of Rage* were great console exclusives that represented a step in the right direction, and Sega even published some wonderful platform games in the shape of *Psycho Fox* and *Alex Kidd*, but these did little to slow *Mario*'s astronomical rise in popularity. By 1990 there had been four incredible *Mario* platform games, each one somehow more ingenious than the last, to the point where for many people Mario and videogames were one and the same thing. Sega still needed its Mario.

Perhaps it's a sign of how things had changed by the Nineties, or maybe it shows just how different Sega and Nintendo really were, but Sonic's origins were actually very different to those of Mario. The latter was famously created out of necessity. The limitations of 1981's visual technology meant that it was difficult to even create a character that could be recognised as a person, so Mario became a short, fat plumber with a moustache not because Shigeru Miyamoto had any urge to tell a story about a man in dungarees but because that was all the technology would allow. By 1991, however, technology had progressed to the point where just about any character could be represented on screen, so instead of creating a character out of blocks on graph paper with a particular type of game in mind, Sega simply started with paper and the desire to make a character of any kind.

"Everything about Sonic The Hedgehog was designed to make the game play quickly, keep momentum up, keep moving at top speed"

In what is now a part of the company's legend, Sega set several of its best designers to work, challenging them to create a new character that could become a new type of hero for Sega and a true rival to Mario. Several characters were created as a result of this exercise, many of which were used in later games, but the winner was a little blue hedgehog, drawn by Naoto Oshima, one of the designers on the first two *Phantasy Star* games.

Originally named Mr Needlemouse, Oshima's hedgehog was coloured the same blue as the Sega logo, which only seemed appropriate since the character was designed to be the company's new mascot. Designed primarily to appeal to an American audience, he also featured the colours white and red, though Oshima puts this down to coincidence, citing Santa Claus's colour scheme and the belt across Michael Jackson's jacket on the cover to *Bad* as the inspiration for Sonic's shoes. Finally, Oshima wanted to imbue his character with a 'can do' attitude, inspired by television footage of the then Arkansas governor Bill Clinton. In the original design, Sonic also had fangs and played in a rock band, but these elements were removed under the advice of Sega America's Madeline Schroeder.

Sonic's friendly but cool character design was certainly effective, but nobody ever played *Super Mario Bros* because they liked the character. At least we hope they didn't. Sonic needed the best kind of platform game, and he got one from Yuji

Developer Quotes

"I have great memories of *Sonic*. In fact, it provided a ton of inspiration for a game Team17 developed in the early Nineties (*Superfrog*) and I guess a host of others too. The speed of the game, along with great vibrant art was a real head-turner at the time. It's a powerful series that's had a rollercoaster ride the last few years but I would like to hope it's getting back to where it was. I much prefer the 2D playfields."

Martyn Brown, co-founder of Team 17



Developer Quotes

"I remember seeing *Sonic* at an early trade show in the US. It was January 1991 at CES Las Vegas. It was a single level and fairly low profile on Sega's booth – just one or two discreet screens. The Genesis had been launched in the US six months before.

"Six months later at the summer CES in Chicago, Sega went into overdrive promoting *Sonic*. It stole the show. Back then all videogames were slow, so this was revolutionary and eye-catching! Sega set out to use *Sonic* to demonstrate the speed of their new console, and they pulled it off fantastically!"

Phillip Oliver, CEO & co-founder of Blitz Games Studios

Must-Have Merchandise

There's been an unquantifiable amount of Sonic merchandise produced in the past 20 years. Here's our pick of some of the most interesting examples

1. BOARD GAME
MB Games licensed tons of videogame properties for its board game business in the Eighties and Nineties. The *Sonic* one is typical of the line, vaguely translating the videogame experience into a fun but uncomplicated board game.



2. STYLUS
Released as a pre-order incentive for DS RPG *Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood*, this collection of three styluses allows you to decorate your DS with Sonic, Knuckles and… uh… someone we don't recognise.



3. SONIC RACING SYSTEM
Being focused on speed, Sonic has appeared in a bunch of racing games, both video and physical. This one is a lot like Scalextric, only with a hedgehog and a fox instead of cars.



4. PAPERCRAFT
Created by Sega to celebrate Sonic's 15th anniversary in 2006, this model re-creates Green Hill Zone in colourful, papery style. Get it from: **sonic.sega.jp/SonicChannel/enjoy/papercraft/index.html**



5. CONFUSING BACKPACK
You might have a hard time finding this bootleg backpack out in the wild but it's sure worth the effort. Just look at how many confusing, incongruous elements it packs into a single item.





Naka and Hirokazu Yasuhara, Sega programmer and game designer respectively, who joined with Oshima to form Sonic Team and develop *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

Yuji Naka was practically legendary at Sega for his incredible programming ability, and his influence over *Sonic The Hedgehog* cannot be overstated. Naka was a great fan of *Super Mario Bros* but wanted to play something much faster, so that was the direction that the project went in. Everything about it was designed to make the game play quickly – quite ironic given the slow speed of hedgehogs. There are the loop-the-loops and the springs, all good for keeping momentum up, and the gameplay flowing from left to right, while Sonic's ability to curl into a spiky ball mid-jump allowed him to hit an enemy, eliminate it, and then keep moving at top speed.



The resulting game was pure Sega. Almost blinding in its use of colour, thrilling to play and totally unwilling to take itself too seriously, it was a true pleasure that effortlessly appealed to anyone who tried it and had a very likeable character as its star. Tyler Sigman, lead designer on 2006's *Sonic Rivals*, recalls: "I played the original *Sonic* on Genesis when I was a teenager, and like most people, I loved it! The speed, graphics and character were great. Like *Mario* and *Mega Man*, *Sonic* was really memorable platforming. It seems such a small thing now, but Sonic's attitude really did stand out from a lot of other characters at the time," he says, citing the way Sonic would impatiently tap his feet when left alone as an example of the hedgehog's cool factor.

Christian Senn, director of the cancelled *Sonic X-Treme*, is also a fan of Sonic's famous attitude but takes the time to praise the exciting, kinetic gameplay of the original game. "I liked Sonic's look, his attitude, and the way it felt to zoom around the playfields," he says. "I liked the look and functionality of the enemies, the fact

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games… and a few others



Sonic The Hedgehog
Multi | 1991
One year after the competition to find a Sega figurehead, Sonic's first outing was unveiled. Created by Yuji Naka, *Sonic The Hedgehog*'s mixture of speed and graphical finesse helped to establish the Mega Drive as a serious contender in the hearts of gamers the world over.

Sonic The Hedgehog 2
Multi | 1992
This time, players found themselves immersed in a game that had been improved in every conceivable way. It was also the first console game to have a worldwide launch when Tuesday 24 November 1992 became known as '*Sonic 2*'s Day'. Geddit?





SEGASonic The Hedgehog
Arcade | 1993
With the home market stitched up, Sega decided to try its hand in the arcades. Trackballs at the ready and two new characters to play with failed to inspire much interest. Poor distribution and the fact that the game deviated from the normal gameplay didn't help either.

Sonic CD
Mega-CD | 1993
New hardware meant that there really was only one character to sell it to the masses. Basically, this was *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* with a time travel element. For what it's worth, the game did try to make use of the CD-ROM, with much-improved animation and sound.





Sonic Chaos
Game Gear | 1993
Handheld gamers rejoiced at the knowledge that Sonic was back on the Game Gear. This time you could play through the game as Tails, who had been absent from previous Game Gear outings, as the game revealed more fully what the handheld was capable of.

"Following directly behind Sonic at all times, Tails' ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride"

that they provided some challenge and offered a break from the rush of speed. I think what I enjoyed most of all about the game was the balance between puzzles, speed, combat and collection. The physics and feeling of interaction really felt great."

The game and its star became synonymous with Sega and helped propel the Mega Drive to sales of around 40 million, only 9 million short of the SNES – a minuscule gap compared to the 47 million that separated the Master System and NES. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was so popular that it inevitably became a huge brand for Sega, starting, of course, with sequels. Four such sequels followed on the Mega Drive and Mega-CD alone, not to mention all the spin-off games and Master System and Game Gear exclusives that also appeared in the same period. Aside from some tiny proportional changes, Sonic's appearance remained the same in the sequels. And why wouldn't it? Sega pretty much got the design spot-on from the beginning. Plus, the company's artists probably had their hands busy designing the multitude of new characters that the publisher somehow seemed to think were so necessary.

Tails wasn't so bad, admittedly. In fact, his inclusion in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* is one of the single most underrated features of the series. Following directly behind Sonic at all times, his ginger blur added a nice visual flourish to the game's colourful rollercoaster ride. And then there's the fact that a second player could plug in their own pad and take control of Tails, happily jumping around behind Sonic and helping out with enemies, but without the risk of failure. It's the sort of feature that games all too rarely employ, allowing a younger or less skilled player to join in and have fun without any frustration, and it's something that the *Mario* series has only recently begun to experiment with in *Super Mario Galaxy*'s co-star mode.

Sadly the same can't be said for the other characters introduced through *Sonic*'s early years. The likes of Knuckles and Amy Rose signified the start of a worrying trend toward unnecessary, annoying new characters that would only get worse as the years went by. Though the early to mid Nineties certainly has its fair share of terrible sidekicks. Anyone remember Mighty the Armadillo, Espio the Chameleon or – ahem – Nack the Weasel? No, thought not. Despite the invasion of the world's most annoying characters, *Sonic 2* and *3*, *Sonic & Knuckles* and *Sonic CD* all proved to be brilliant platform games and all played their part in catapulting Sega's little blue hedgehog into popular culture as a whole. Countless merchandise tie-ins



Developer Quotes

"Like a *Super Mario* game on steroids, *Sonic* was a wonderwall of hyperkinetic play for the ADHD generation. The feeling was supersonic... sans gin and tonic!"

Eugene Jarvis, creator of Robotron: 2084 and Defender

» [Mega Drive] *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* introduced Tails, who was fine on his own but started a worrying trend.

Sonic Spinball
Multi | 1993
As popular as Sonic was, *Sonic Spinball* was an attempt to cash in yet further on the blue speedy one. Once again, deviating from what gamers expected proved its undoing, and the fact that this was a deeply average game didn't help matters.





Sonic Drift
Game Gear | 1994
What Game Gear fans needed was a *Mario Kart* game, or so Sega decided. A *Mario Kart*-style racer would have been ideal. However, what Japanese gamers got was a slow, dull and uninspired racing game that was never released outside Japan, thankfully.

Sonic The Hedgehog 3
Mega Drive | 1994
A return to form for Sonic with this very impressive outing that not only looked beautiful but also added a greater depth of gameplay than had been seen previously. Of special note is that this is the first *Sonic* game to feature a save feature, thanks to the built-in battery.





Sonic & Knuckles
Mega Drive | 1994
Picking up where *Sonic 3* left off, this is more of the same great gameplay lifted from its predecessor. However, thanks to the use of Sega's lock-on technology, further gaming bonuses could be attained by simply connecting the cart to other *Sonic* games. Genius.

Sonic Triple Trouble
Game Gear | 1994
After a glut of ill-conceived Game Gear outings, the ickle Sonic was back on form and back to doing what he and Tails did best – collecting rings, emeralds and racing through bonus stages. As Game Gear *Sonic* games go, this was mightily impressive.



followed, including a total of four different animated TV series, a movie and enough comic books to destroy an entire rainforest. And there were more games too, Sonic proving so popular that Sega felt it could drop him into any old game to boost sales. Which, to be honest, it was right about. Throughout the early Nineties, *Sonic* characters starred in a *Puyo Puyo* clone, a pinball game, two kart racers and a couple of isometric platformers too, all of them very successful. Sega had clearly got the Mario equivalent it was looking for.

As Sega transitioned from the Mega Drive to the Saturn, it only seemed inevitable that Sonic would make the leap too, but, for a multitude of reasons, it never really happened. He certainly put in his fair share of appearances, though. There was the not really 3D at all *Sonic 3D*, the actually quite brilliant retro compilation *Sonic Jam*, and the technically impressive racing game *Sonic R*. But no proper platform game. Sonic Team chose to spend the Saturn era developing original ideas like *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Burning Rangers* instead – for which we're very thankful, of course – while the US-based Sega Technical Institute was charged with developing a full 3D update of the series in the form of *Sonic X-Treme*, which sadly failed to reach completion.

Developer Quotes

"Sega knew they needed a character of their own that could match up with Mario, but that is easier said than done. They set an ambitious goal and managed to pull it off in a compelling and unique way."

Trip Hawkins, founder of Electronic Arts and 3DO

Christian Senn recalls the process of trying to rework the character of Sonic into three dimensions. "I wanted to maintain the look and feel of the 2D Sonic from *Sonic 3* for *Sonic X-Treme*," he says. "In addition to the game graphics, the original sketches of Sonic by Naoto Oshima were wonderful and I was drawn to them as inspiration for *X-Treme*. I discussed a desire to maintain the integrity of the original 2D art style with lead artist Ross Harris, who subsequently did a brilliant job of bringing Sonic to life in 3D. We had not yet seen any representations of Sonic in 3D, so it was very exciting to pave new ground. We wanted to continue the quality and polish that our predecessors had achieved, so attention to the big picture and the details was essential."

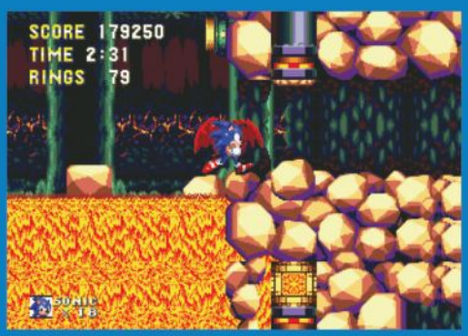
Translating the gameplay into 3D was less easy, however, and may be the key to the reason why the troubled *Sonic X-Treme* was never completed. "I desired to take the aforementioned balance of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and translate it into 3D," says Senn. "Not having any idea of how large a bite we were trying to chew, the intention was to combine speed, puzzle-solving, ring-collection, bonus rounds, special rounds, enemies, bosses and some new gameplay elements nobody had every seen before. One of the hallmarks of the successive 2D *Sonic* titles was to introduce something new every game. We were trying to create all of the original elements for the first time in a whole new dimension, and even add more. In hindsight, it might have been wise to attempt to re-create the basic elements of the 2D games in 3D, which might have allowed us time to polish the game before finishing and releasing it."

"The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'. Getting the feeling of speed was a real challenge"

Jon Burton, founder and director of Traveller's Tales, had more success than Senn, creating and finishing two *Sonic* games, *Sonic 3D* and *Sonic R*, for the Saturn, though neither of them could really be classed as proper *Sonic* platform games. "The key thing I remember Sega always pushing for was to 'make Sonic move faster'," says Burton. "In *Sonic 3D*, getting the feeling of speed was a



» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3* was so big and ambitious that it was split in half, with the rest of it going into *Sonic & Knuckles*.



Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others



Sonic Drift 2
Game Gear | 1995
Compared to the original, *Sonic Drift 2* was a much more considered sequel. This time the game delivered a better Grand Prix mode, banked curves, hills and the all-important link-up mode. Not the class act that *Mario Kart* proved to be, but a worthy attempt nonetheless.



Sonic Labyrinth
Game Gear | 1995
Sega continued to treat Game Gear owners to more variants. This time it decided that a puzzle game in the style of *Marble Madness* was the order of the day. However, the time limits and puzzle elements brought down what may have been a half-decent game.



Sonic The Fighters
Arcade | 1996
It had been three years since the last *Sonic* outing at the arcades, so it must have seemed prudent to have another stab at the coin-op fans. Unfortunately, because it was aimed at kids, it lacked depth and ultimately proved to be an unrewarding experience.



Sonic 3D
Multi | 1996
New console, new *Sonic* game. Well, kind of... This was pretty much the same game that would appear on the Mega Drive but with added 3D tunnels. However, at the time it impressed gamers and gave them an indication of what the Saturn was capable of.



Sonic Jam
Saturn | 1997
This had nothing to do with fruit, but from Sega's point of view it wasn't a bad ploy to get some money from Saturn owners who missed out on the Mega Drive games. Aside from the omission of *Sonic CD*, this was the perfect way to enjoy classic *Sonic* action.

Toon Struck

Robby London was head of creative affairs at DIC, the animation studio behind scores of popular children's cartoons between 1980 and 2008, including three different Sonic The Hedgehog series. Here he tells us what it was like to work with Sega's most famous face

Retro Gamer: What was your first experience of *Sonic The Hedgehog* and what did you think?
Robby London: We knew just from its trending popularity at the time that we wanted to pitch Sega of America on the idea of developing *Sonic* into an animated series for television, and so we needed to bone up on the property. Since I am not a gamer, we got one of the DIC artists who was a *Sonic* aficionado to play it for a video capture. So I was introduced to it by watching a video of the game being played. I recall thinking it had a very charismatic lead character and an interesting look. Of course, I couldn't make too much sense of the story elements, but then in those days it was quite typical for the lore behind most games to be elusive and impenetrable.

RG: What instructions did Sega give you in terms of what you could or couldn't do with the character?
RL: I don't remember any specific upfront instructions per se, other than emphasising to us how crucially important and valuable Sonic was to them. Which, of course, we knew! Sega did retain a contractual approval right for everything we did. So when we'd submit something like a character design, they would often have comments or requests for revisions, mostly on specific details of the designs, and mostly to ensure there was conformity across all the *Sonic* products they were licensing. They also had approval rights on all the voices, music, individual scripts for the episodes and various other creative elements. While they gave notes and requested revisions from time to time, I can't remember any specific theme to their comments nor any generic instructions. They had a representative named Jane Thompson who spent a lot of time with us in LA. Because she was professional and knowledgeable about production, that turned out to be exceedingly helpful.

RG: What do you think are the important characteristics of Sonic and how are these captured in a cartoon rather than a game?
RL: Mostly, I think it's attitude. Even Sega's original design of the character conveyed a lot of 'tude; cockiness, perseverance and a sort of a devil-be-damned outlook. Traits such as these lend themselves really well to an animated character for a television cartoon and can be significantly enhanced in that medium. Those of us who were writers created a lore and a context and situations for Sonic to demonstrate this persona with a richness that was not possible in the game. We came up with the phrase 'fastest thing alive', the signature arms-crossed, impatient foot-tapping pose, along with the catchphrase: 'I'm waiiiiting.' We also gave the character an actual voice, in this case Jaleel White, a huge TV star in America at the time for his role as Steve Urkel [in sitcom *Family Matters*]. Writers created the lines and the personality and Jaleel helped bring it to life. And in those days, even the animation itself that was possible in television far surpassed the limitations of videogames of the time.

real challenge. We had an upper limit on how fast we could physically scroll the screen, so Sonic could never move as fast as we wanted him to. Having the boost pads and bumpers helped, but he definitely moved slower in *Sonic 3D* than any other *Sonic* game. In *Sonic R*, the whole point of the game was racing, so the feeling of speed could really be focused on. In that game, the rings were very important as they would open up boost gates and secret short cuts, so the rings were used like a currency to 'buy' short cuts for better lap times."

The Saturn had some incredible games, of course, but if ever a console needed its star attraction it was this one. Up against the spectacularly popular PlayStation, the Saturn really needed every advantage it could get, and particularly after the world-changing brilliance of *Super Mario 64*, everyone expected *Sonic* to make the transition from pixels to polygons in style. It never really happened on the Saturn, but *Sonic* did eventually go 3D in the following generation, and Sega wasted virtually no time getting the game out there, launching *Sonic*

Developer Quotes

"Growing up, I was a hardcore Nintendo fanboy. The Genesis changed all that and made me an overall videogame fan instead of a one-console fanboy, which is a really silly way to be, but that's another article. I loved character platformers, so when *Sonic* came around with that crazy blast processing and insane speeds I was hooked. Loved the look, style and play, and it had a huge influence over my first commercial success – *Jazz Jackrabbit*!"

Cliff Bleszinski, creator of Jazz Jackrabbit

Sonic R
Saturn | 1997
A cracking Saturn game and one that succeeded because it offered something different. *Sonic R* was a 3D racer that pitted familiar characters against one another. Oddly enough, this wasn't developed by Sonic Team but rather by British developer Traveller's Tales.





Sonic Adventure
Dreamcast | 1999
After the demise of the Saturn, Sonic returned faster and sleeker than ever. Determined to make the Dreamcast a success, Sonic Team did everything to ensure that *Sonic Adventure* was a big adventure that ably demonstrated the technical proficiency of the new console.

Sonic Pocket Adventure
Neo Geo Pocket Color | 1999
'Anything but the GBC' must have been the cry at Sega when it decided to make another portable edition. Taking elements from *Sonic 2* and *3* as well as bolting on a link-up option where you could race against your friends once again showed the prowess of Sega.





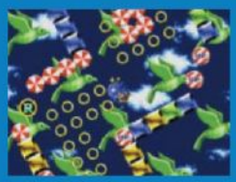
Sonic Shuffle
Dreamcast | 2000
Hot on the heels of *Sonic Adventure* came *Sonic Shuffle*, a collection of puzzle games not unlike *Mario Party*, which must have partly inspired Sega's stab at the genre. It was a fairly dire experience but it was capped off with some lovely cel-shaded graphics.

Sonic Adventure 2
Dreamcast | 2001
By now the Dreamcast was all but gone, but it didn't stop Sonic Team releasing one last *Sonic* game on a Sega console – it was Sonic's tenth anniversary and it would have seemed rude not to. However, this wasn't the last we'd see of the Blue Blur...



The Special Stages

One of the most memorable parts of the early Sonic games are the hidden stages that featured completely different gameplay to the main adventures



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

The original special stage isn't exactly the best, but it is still fun. In it you control a curled-up Sonic as he bounces around a rotating maze, trying to get to the Chaos Emerald in the centre while avoiding the exits. The same special stage also appeared in *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I*.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

Definitely the most popular special stage of them all, this one saw Sonic and Tails running straight down the screen along a half-pipe, collecting rings and avoiding bombs. It was a technical marvel at the time, creating a sense of 3D depth that was rare on the Mega Drive.



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3

Continuing the trend of 3D bonus stages, *Sonic 3*'s effort asked you to run around a globe and walk over the top of coloured balls in order to change them from blue to red. Hit a red ball, however, and Sonic would bounce off, often straight into trouble. This stage was also in *Sonic & Knuckles*.



SONIC CD

Making great use of the Mega-CD's sprite-scaling abilities, *Sonic CD*'s special stage was basically a 3D open world in which Sonic could run in any direction, in order to hunt down and destroy robots. Another technical marvel, this was just one of many things that made *Sonic CD* special.



SONIC 3D

The Saturn version of *Sonic 3D* featured a special stage that was very similar to *Sonic 2*'s, but the Mega Drive edition was more original, using sprite rotation to create platforms for Sonic to use to reach the end. Though they looked great, these stages suffered from some unfortunate pop-up.

Developer Quotes

"I first saw it when shown to me by a journo mate – same guy who brought me a NES and *Super Mario* one weekend, which really was a life-changing event. I remember being impressed by the bright colours and the speed. It seemed ridiculously fast, especially compared to *Mario*. It was obviously Sega's reply to Mario, attempting to establish a similarly iconic main character with an excellent platform game. I liked that they didn't try simply to ape *Mario*, but distinguished *Sonic* with detailed environments, big areas and the speed. *Sonic 2* remains my favourite, though!"

Jeff Minter, developer of Tempest 2000

Adventure alongside the Dreamcast in America and Europe.

Sonic Adventure was a bold new direction for Sega's mascot, and though far from perfect, it was an interesting update after so many years of anticipation. Sonic Team could have easily settled on a simple 3D interpretation of the classic *Sonic* games but went so much further, incorporating many contemporary ideas such as vast explorable areas in addition to its linear, rollercoaster-like levels. The focus was also broadened far beyond Sonic himself, allowing control of six different characters, all of whom had their own adventure and style of play. A great idea in theory, this proved successful from a game design perspective but didn't exactly make *Sonic Adventure* popular with those who didn't like the series' ever-expanding cast.

"The rise of the Mega Drive days, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point and ultimately the modern era's focus on classic values"

Sonic Adventure also divided fans by lending a voice to its characters, almost turning the game into an interactive cartoon. American voice actor Ryan Drummond portrayed Sonic and recalls the loose approach that Sega took towards defining

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic Advance

Game Boy Advance | 2001

Having spurned Nintendo's GBA in favour of less popular handhelds, it was great to see the little fella finally getting the small screen attention he deserved and, best of all, it was an all-new adventure, which drew upon elements from all his previous outings.





Sonic Advance 2

Game Boy Advance | 2002

Having become one of the bestselling GBA titles, it was a pretty safe bet that Sega would ensure that *Sonic* would return. Not only is this a better game than the original GBA outing but it also introduces us to the rather oddly named Cream the Rabbit...

Sonic Battle

Game Boy Advance | 2003

A woefully bad fighting game, *Sonic Battle* tried to cash in on the popularity of Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros* series on a system that wasn't nearly powerful enough to pull off a game of that calibre. This is one *Sonic* spin-off game that's best avoided.





Sonic Pinball Party

Game Boy Advance | 2003

A fun little pinball sim that also happened to feature tables based on other Sega fan favourites *NiGHTS Into Dreams* and *Samba De Amigo*. *Sonic Pinball Party* wasn't quite as clever as the Mega Drive's *Sonic Spinball*, but it was still pretty good fun.

Sonic Heroes

Multi | 2003

Sonic made his cross-platform debut in style with this underrated platformer, which played like *Sonic Adventure 2* but with a new system that saw three characters teaming up at once. Players had to swap between all three to overcome the game's challenges.



such an important part of the character. "At the audition, there was a picture of Sonic hanging up in the voiceover booth," he remembers. "The direction I got from the studio engineer was more of a question: 'If you heard a voice coming out of that blue hedgehog, what would it sound like?' I knew Sonic was all about energy and speed and youth, so I just thought it over, opened my mouth, and that's what came out. I remember that I didn't have time to rehearse it. I didn't even know what the voice was going to sound like until I was actually doing it into the microphone for the Sega folks. It just happened."

Sonic himself also got a complete overhaul with *Sonic Adventure*. Redesigned by Yuji Uekawa, a Sonic Team veteran with experience dating back to *Ristar*, the new Sonic was a much edgier creation. Taller, slimmer and somehow spikier, he'd lost a little of his friendliness but made up for it with an anime-style cool. This is the Sonic that has remained ever since, though the games have been wildly different.

Part of the reason for this was Sega's switch to multiformat development. After abandoning the Dreamcast, the company had to take Sonic to new frontiers, creating games for Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo formats for the first time. Our hero probably felt most at home on Nintendo formats, which had a similar user base to that of the Dreamcast, so both *Sonic Adventure* games were quickly ported to the GameCube, in addition to the friendly and colourful new *Sonic Heroes*. But Sega also made some rather unfortunate assumptions about its new audiences. The huge Western focus of the Xbox and PlayStation 2, for example, led Sonic Team to believe that the consoles' owners would prefer a moodier, more violent *Sonic* game, and so the developer created the terribly misguided *Shadow The Hedgehog*, in which Sonic's nemesis embarrassingly wields two handguns and drives a truck.

"As he became more 'hip with attitude', Sonic became faster and faster," notes Christian Senn of this later period of *Sonic* history. "I think it was good to push boundaries, explore new avenues, and learn what worked and what didn't so that successive games could improve. One element I think had a difficult time translating into 3D was the precision control offered in the 2D games. Pushing more towards blinding speed and combat seemed to be a trend, as well as introducing many new characters. Some amazing environments, visuals, gameplay mechanics and special effects have

Developer Quotes

"I bought a Genesis during my early days at LucasArts, and I still keep it hooked up. I have only a dozen games for it now, and two are *Sonic The Hedgehog*. The first one came with the machine. I'm not sure if I, an allegedly cool and sophisticated 20-something, would have purchased a platformer about a cute animal, but there it was, so I gave it a whirl. It was highly addictive, and I played it relentlessly. I liked zooming around, flinging myself into the air – in fact, my enjoyment of *Sonic* was not unlike my enjoyment of pinball. If I close my eyes I can still hear the jingling sound of rings."

Dave Grossman, Telltale Games



» [Dreamcast] Some series fans still can't utter the name 'Shadow' without shuddering.



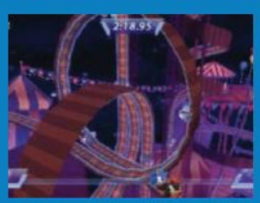
» *Sonic Spinball* was turned into a rollercoaster at Alton Towers, where it remains today.



Sonic Advance 3
Game Boy Advance | 2004
The final GBA game focused on the interplay between Sonic and his co-stars. A tag system allowed you to swap between two characters on the fly, a bit like *Donkey Kong Country*, while various pairings unlocked different abilities depending on the combinations.

Sonic Rush
DS | 2005
After showing a terrible over-the-shoulder *Sonic* DS demo at E3 2004, Sega went back to the drawing board and returned with this effort. Its major innovation was the use of two screens for huge loops and other fun bits of level design.





Sonic Rivals
PSP | 2006
Though it looks like a platform game, *Sonic Rivals* is actually a pretty clever side-scrolling racing game. It's also, strangely, the first *Sonic* game to break with its roots and not be released in Japan, but don't let that put you off. It's actually pretty decent.

Sonic Riders
Multi | 2006
Yet another *Sonic*-themed racing game, this one used the same engine as the Sega-developed *F-Zero GX* and saw Sonic and chums riding hoverboards. Sadly, it was total rubbish and spent more time firing you into walls than anything else.





Sonic The Hedgehog
Multi | 2006
Sonic arrived on HD consoles in a game that looked promising and was reminiscent of the original *Sonic Adventure*, only far inferior in quality. This unfortunate reboot is the main reason that people assume all modern *Sonic* games to be rubbish.

been created throughout the years that really did appeal to me."

It's quite fashionable to write off all modern *Sonic* games as rubbish, but the truth is that they've been of varying quality, ranging from abysmal to brilliant. The 2006 version of *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a total disaster, featuring some really dodgy gameplay and a worrying relationship between hedgehog and human girl. And then there's *Sonic Unleashed*, an initially promising platform game that absolutely ruined itself with a series of awful beat-'em-up levels in which Sonic transforms into a sort of werewolf thing with big stretchy arms. But then there's *Sonic Rush*, a fun little 2D platformer with the added bonus of skating-style grinds and tricks that actually fit very comfortably into the regular gameplay. Or even the recently released *Sonic The Hedgehog 4* and *Sonic Colours*, both extremely playable platform games that happened to ditch the furry friends.

"I've got to say that *Sonic* has always worked best in 2D, in my opinion," says Jon Burton of Traveller's Tales. "I also think that the character from *Sonic Adventure* onwards changed, and I didn't like it as much. The cameras in those games I found really hard work compared to something like *Mario 64* as well. Personally, I think a blend of what we do in the *Lego* series of games and the traditional 2D *Sonic* gameplay style would make for an amazing game. You have my number, Sega..."

Tyler Sigman, lead designer on *Sonic Rivals*, agrees: "The franchise has definitely changed, but that's something to be expected. In *Sonic*'s case, I'd say it's a bit of a victim of its own success. What I mean by that is that *Sonic* is a great 2D side-scrolling platformer franchise. I think the translation to 3D has had more misses than hits. That's not to say they are all terrible, but the quality has varied a lot and in general I think it remains a better side-scrolling game than over-the-shoulder game."

It's certainly true that the best *Sonic* games of recent years are the ones that play in the traditional style, but you can't ignore the fact that some of the worst are also the ones with the most unnecessary additional characters. Shadow the Hedgehog, Silver the Hedgehog, Big the Cat, Cream the Rabbit, Blaze the Cat and Rouge the Bat... All were unnecessary and all annoying. Thankfully, Sega seems to have finally realised this and has mostly relegated them to ensemble pieces like *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* or *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*, keeping the platform games focused purely on Sonic himself. Or Sonic *themselves*, if the latest game is anything to go by.

Designed to celebrate Sonic's 20th anniversary, *Sonic Generations* teamed its hero up with the 1991 version of himself, taking the series full circle with both completely 3D and 2D levels depending on which Sonic you choose to play as. It was a highly entertaining outing that did a



» [Mega Drive] *Sonic 3D*, while flawed and not truly 3D, was a reasonable attempt at bringing Sonic into the third dimension.

Developer Quotes

"Up until the point where I had moved out on my own, I had been primarily a Nintendo fan, at least in regards to home consoles. My NES had carried me through high school and college, as the Master System hadn't quite done it for me. This changed when *Sonic* arrived on the Genesis. As a young man with little money, struggling with new-found responsibilities, it took careful consideration to determine what games I'd buy, but there was no getting around it: I had to have this amazing, impossibly fast blue creature running amok. Sonic was the character who turned me into a Sega fanatic."

James Mielke, Q Entertainment

Sonic Timeline

A quick guide to Sonic's most memorable games... and a few others

Sonic Rivals 2
PSP | 2007
Sonic Rivals 2 was pretty much more of the same as last time out, except that it expanded the cast of playable characters from five to eight. Each character was also paired off with a team-mate who would run behind them, harking back to *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*.





Sonic Rush Adventure
DS | 2007
A fairly unsuccessful sequel, *Sonic Rush Adventure* spoiled its otherwise excellent gameplay by implementing totally unnecessary seafaring sections, reminiscent of the similarly divisive sequences in *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, only much worse.

Sonic And The Secret Rings
Wii | 2007
Sonic has had a fairly good run of games on the Wii, and his debut on the system was very good indeed. An over-the-shoulder platform game, it made good use of the Wii Remote's tilt controls for a fast and intuitive rollercoaster ride of an experience.





Sonic Unleashed
Multi | 2008
Titled *Sonic World Adventure* in Japan, this 3D *Sonic* game promised to revitalize the series by mixing *Sonic Adventure*-style 3D gameplay with more classic 2D assault courses. But it ruined all that by adding 'werehog' sections with tedious beat-'em-up gameplay.

Sonic Chronicles
DS | 2008
The first and only *Sonic* RPG, *Sonic Chronicles* was actually made by BioWare, the Canadian studio behind high-profile RPGs like *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*. *Chronicles* wasn't quite up to its usual standard but was one of the better *Sonic* spin-offs produced.





Sonic's Cameos

Sonic is so famous, he's even appeared in a bunch of other characters' games too. Here are some of the most notable



RAD MOBILE

This 3D arcade racing game from AM2 and Yu Suzuki features a Sonic-shaped air freshener hanging in front of the windscreen. Interestingly, this was actually the first appearance of Sonic, predating his Mega Drive debut by about six months.



SOLEIL

A Mega Drive RPG with similarities to *The Legend Of Zelda*, *Soleil* features a scene in which Sonic can be found sunbathing on a beach with his feet up. All that running around, defeating Dr Robotnik, must tire him out.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2

Years before Sega and Nintendo made friends, the latter took a swipe at Sonic here. The ranking screen features a number of famous Nintendo characters but alludes to Sonic and Earthworm Jim in the category of 'No Hopers'.



CHRISTMAS NiGHTS

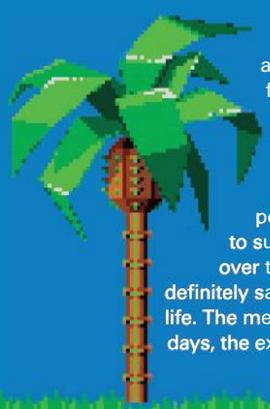
This free Christmas-themed edition of Sonic Team's *NiGHTS Into Dreams* allowed you to collect several interactive Christmas gifts within the game, including one where you could play the game as Sonic and fight a huge, round Dr Eggman boss.



SUPER SMASH BROS BRAWL

After years of rumour, Sonic finally got to fight his rival in the Wii's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*, and he even got his own stage based on Green Hill Zone, with a newly rearranged version of the Angel Island Zone theme from *Sonic 3*.

"Sega wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. What it got is a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad"



fantastic job of capturing the spirit of his earlier games. Next up is *Sonic: Lost World*, which again attempts to take Sonic in fresh and exciting directions, this time on Wii U and 3DS. This last point is interesting as it marks yet another Nintendo exclusive for Sega's popular mascot. If you were to summarise the career of Sonic over these past 22 years, you could definitely say that he's lived an interesting life. The meteoric rise of the Mega Drive days, the explosion into popular culture, the wilderness years of the Saturn, the big comeback on the Dreamcast followed by a low point of mediocrity and over-saturation and ultimately into the modern era and its focus on quality, experimentation and classic values. It's definitely, appropriately, been a series of ups and downs, even loops. But it's testament to Sonic's enduring popularity that he's managed to bounce back from any low point in this time. Sega wanted its own Mario; a character to help shift consoles. But what it got is something slightly different; a character that has helped Sega through good times and bad and has gone on to become a hero to all gamers, no matter which console they happen to own.

Developer Quotes

"The first time I heard about *Sonic* was when someone commented that it was overrated and that the music was pretty bad. It motivated me to rent a Mega Drive and check it out for myself. Having a new console for a day was quite a special experience and I played the game until it had to be returned.

"I don't think I finished it, but I remember being impressed by the special stages and the loops. I did not fall in love with the game that day, although I feel a connection with the character since then and I've wanted it to be awesome for the last 20 years. Perhaps *Sonic Generations* will be?"

Collin van Ginkel, co-founder Two Tribes



Sonic And The Black Knight

Wii | 2009

One of the more derided modern *Sonic* games, *Sonic And The Black Knight* is actually much better than it's given credit for. Set in a medieval fantasy world, it re-imagines the *Sonic* characters as knights of the round table and equips them all with swords.

Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I

Multi | 2010

Returning to the series' roots, this completely 2D game starred only Sonic himself and played fairly close to the style of the original Mega Drive trilogy. Only some slightly stodgy physics stopped it from being perfect.





Sonic Colours

Wii | 2010

One of the best *Sonic* games in recent years, *Sonic Colours* featured mostly side-on gameplay as well as collectable Wisps that temporarily change Sonic's abilities. It almost played like a cross between *Sonic Adventure 2* and *NiGHTS Into Dreams*.

Sonic Colours

DS | 2010

The DS version of *Sonic Colours* went even further than the Wii version in its drive to return to a more classical 2D style of *Sonic* gameplay. Some people even believe that it's the superior version of the two… and they happen to be correct.





Sonic Generations

Multi | 2011

Though not yet released, *Sonic Generations* looks to be another great *Sonic* game. Teaming up the modern version of Sonic with the more cartoony retro version, it allows you to play any stage either completely in 3D or completely in 2D. It's about time too.

THE MAKING OF

GUNSTAR HEROES



Treasure's stunning debut on Sega's 16-bit console was a game that many assumed simply wasn't possible due to the machine's hardware limitations. Jonti Davies chats with Masato Maegawa, producer of Gunstar Heroes and president of Treasure, about the finer points of running and gunning through a gorgeous 2D world







Treasure was born in early 1992, when a group of Konami employees with a shared vision left their parent company. Their motivation for quitting such a successful developer/publisher was simple: they wanted to fully realise their own ideas, free from the restraints typically felt by individuals in large corporations. Setting a dangerously high benchmark for the then-nascent developer, Treasure's landmark first release was the result of a kitchen-sink approach to the run-'n'-gun sub-genre, bringing new ideas to a game style that was in danger of becoming stale.

Masato Maegawa, Treasure's president and *Gunstar Heroes*' producer, is an affable chap, completely modest (but realistic) about the strength of his team's productions. We ask him about the context of *Gunstar Heroes* – what led to its production? "We'd only just established our new company, Treasure, so we were just really keen above all else to do something that we liked and something that was our forte," says Maegawa. "*Gunstar Heroes* was that game. We approached the project with the concept of 'anything goes', and we incorporated many types of separate ambitious ideas in that concept."

Among those fresh ideas for the genre were numerical energy counters in place of the more common one-hit-you're-dead routine; symbolic colour labelling in lieu of character names; a heady blend of long and close-range attacks; a mishmash of auto-scrolling and player-led passages of action; weapons that could be mixed to form new attacking powers; and some of the most imaginatively constructed bosses to grace a videogame, regardless of vintage or genre, peaking in the inspired melding of a board game with a string of boss battles. To say that *Gunstar Heroes* was created with a notion of 'anything goes' is an understated simplification on Maegawa's part.

Gunstar Heroes begins with a suitably explosive cut-scene sequence, which details the plight of Gunstar 9, the planet on which most of the game is played out. Ambiguous scripting initially leaves the player with only a vague idea of what might be afoot. "WHERE IS HE? THAT LIGHT! IT'S TOO LATE!"… "NO!…



» [Mega Drive] There are some memorable characters in *Gunstar*, including Dr Black, who refuses to give up his gem to Red.



» [Mega Drive] Some ambiguous writing leaves much of *Gunstar Heroes*' world open to interpretation.

THE EARTH… UNDER ONE PERSON'S POWER…" is a classic, befuddling exchange from this opening scene. But it eventually transpires that *Gunstars*' Red and Blue need to reclaim four gemstones in order to stop Smash Daisaku ('Daisaku' being Japanese for 'epic'), an evil dictator who looks a bit like *Street Fighter*'s M Bison, from using those gems to re-power a robot called Golden Silver, which had previously caused havoc by draining planets of their natural resources. Daisaku has even kidnapped Green, the elder brother of Red and Blue, who has been tricked into working for the enemy. Once the four crucial gems are retrieved, the heroic journey of Red and Blue eventually leads to the moon of Gunstar 9, where Red and Blue have to defeat the immense (3D-effect) Core Guard System, before a final multi-stage battle against the game's assembled cast of baddies brings Golden Silver out of its sleep.

In Red and Blue, two iconic videogame characters were born. With nomenclature bordering on the nondescript, they were never likely to capture the imagination of the population at large; but Red and Blue retain a certain mystique that still lights fires in the eyes of gamers. How did *Gunstar Heroes*' characters come to be named in such a way? Maegawa confesses that it wasn't his idea, but the work of *Gunstar* team's character graphics specialist, Han.

"Maybe for Han there was some deep meaning," Maegawa says about his input, "but I think it's just a really good idea because it made it so easy for users to understand what was happening in the game."

Gunstar Heroes' development appears to have been a consummate team effort. Treasure has remained a small studio since its formation, and the first title to come out of Treasure was principally the work of just seven people. Maegawa speaks of the team in familiar terms,

"EVEN WHILE THEY REMAINED AT KONAMI, THE CORE MEMBERS OF TREASURE WERE REGULARLY GETTING TOGETHER TO PLOT A REVOLUTION"

dropping their surnames and referring to them by the nicknames they use within Treasure to this day.

"There were only seven of us who worked on *Gunstar Heroes*: myself, as producer; Yaiman, who was the director and main programmer; Nami, who programmed the enemy AI and other routines; Han, who did the character graphics; Iuchi, who was responsible for the graphics; Non, who did all the music; and our sound effects man, Murata. It took us about ten months to develop *Gunstar Heroes* once we'd established Treasure, but even before that we'd meet in coffee shops and other places for planning sessions."

It's fascinating to visualise such coffee house meetings. Even while they remained at Konami, the core members of Treasure were regularly getting together to plot a revolution. And by finding Sega as a publisher, Treasure's coup d'état would soon be complete: *Gunstar Heroes* blew open the state of 2D platform-shooters, with Treasure rewriting the constitution.

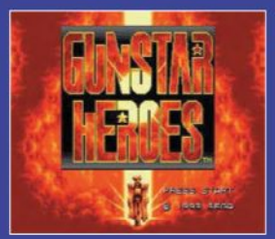
Treasure's deal with Sega was the result of a carefully planned proposal, which suggests that the results of the 'anything goes' approach were largely determined before development began. Maegawa is understandably satisfied with the outcome of events, and stresses that none of the ideas plotted in Tokyo cafés during 1991 and early 1992 were sacrificed or compromised in production.

"There was nothing missing from the final version of *Gunstar Heroes*. It ended up exactly as we first planned it – everything that was in our original specification and proposal to Sega was packed into the game that was eventually sold to players."

Mission accomplished, then. Working with Sega as a publisher, Treasure had full creative control – and that was key to *Gunstar Heroes*' success. Indeed, the only issue that resulted in a difference of opinion between Sega and Treasure was the relatively trivial matter of the game's name. Treasure had considered calling its debut project '*Blade Gunner*', in honour of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, but eventually settled on '*Lunatic Gunstar*'. Maegawa looks back on this matter with good humour.

"It's true that within Treasure we referred to the game as '*Lunatic Gunstar*', right from the start," he says with a wry smile. "We felt that the word 'Lunatic' was a perfect fit to convey the

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:** TREASURE, INC

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP



» [Mega Drive] Like *Super Mario Bros 3*, *Gunstar Heroes* has a big airship and is proud of it.



THE MAKING OF



GUNSTAR VERSIONS

There have been five *Gunstar Heroes* releases. The original Mega Drive game appeared in September 1993. An inferior Game Gear version followed, featuring odd modifications such as a switch from mine carts to helicopter jetpacks in the Underground Mine stage; it lacked some of the original's content (most conspicuously, the Dice Palace level was dropped completely) and ran at a much lower frame rate than the Mega Drive version. An enjoyable sequel, *Gunstar Super Heroes*, was released on the Game Boy Advance in 2005, but this too falls a little way short of the standard set by the Mega Drive original.

It wasn't until late 2006 that the original game resurfaced on the Wii's Virtual Console, preserved in perfect form via the wonders of emulation.

More impressive still, in February 2006 Sega of Japan had published the *Gunstar Heroes: Treasure Box* as part of its PS2-based *Sega Ages* series. The disc contained both the American Genesis version of *Gunstar Heroes* and the Japanese Mega Drive code, along with a subtly different prototype build and the Game Gear version (useful purely for reference).



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ALIEN SOLDIER
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, Wii VIRTUAL CONSOLE
YEAR: 1994

RADIANT SILVERGUN
SYSTEMS: SATURN, ARCADE
YEAR: 1998

GRADIUS V (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: PS2
YEAR: 2004



exhilaration of our game, what with all the explosions and detonations; but that didn't go down too well with Sega of America, who thought that the word 'Lunatic' conveyed a really bad image. Anyway, the 'Heroes' part of the title came from Sega of America – they seemed to think that 'Heroes' was a cool term because it carried a notion of there being some great sense of justice in the game – so in the end we were requested to adopt the *Gunstar Heroes* title."

Irrespective of concerns over its title, Sega must have been happy to see the results of Treasure's early Mega Drive work, especially considering the limitations of the hardware. Maegawa recalls that Treasure had to work around the Mega Drive's limited palette to achieve the desired visual style in *Gunstar Heroes*. "Because of the relatively low number of colours the Mega Drive can display, we had various difficulties in doing what we wanted to do," Maegawa explains. "At first we were drawing the backgrounds with a single palette of 16 colours, but we thought the results looked too sad and desolate, so I requested that we draw scenery with two palettes, giving us 32 colours to work with, which is what we ended up doing."

Aside from the richness of *Gunstar Heroes*' extended palette use, effects such as the rotation and scaling of sprites were used expertly to create a sense of depth. Most impressively, there can be a dozen or more characters on screen and yet the frame rate holds up almost flawlessly throughout, regardless of how explosive the action is becoming. The transformations of the Green-controlled Seven Force boss show Treasure in a cocky frame of mind, juggling and spinning sprites as though they were going out of fashion (funny thing: they were). The faux 3D of the Core Guard System, too, was a spectacle of some note in 1993, its impact almost measuring up to the feats of contemporary FX chip-powered games over on the SNES.

Gunstar Heroes' soundtrack is also hugely impressive. The score shifts in pitch and tone quite dramatically, waltzing with the on-screen action without ever stepping on its toes. We ask Maegawa how such well-judged tunes were achieved in light of the ever-changing nature of the gameplay and its themes. "Well, the music producer was Non," Maegawa reiterates, "who is still here at Treasure. He always, without fail, waits for all levels of a game to be designed so that he can experience the movement of the whole game, and then he begins his composition. And that's how he was when we worked on *Gunstar Heroes*."



» [Mega Drive] The appropriately named 'happy item room' offers sustenance and weapons in the middle of The Dice Palace.

Another vital ingredient of *Gunstar Heroes*' unrelenting punch, often overlooked, is its clever use of sound effects. From the creaking of robotic bosses' limbs to the easily identifiable and distinguishable weapons effects, Murata's work almost sounds like percussion to Non's music. We ask whether Murata worked on *Gunstar Heroes* in the same manner as Non. "Yes," says Maegawa. "In a similar style to Non, our sound effects specialist Murata waits for everything else to be in place and functional before he begins, very slowly and carefully, to apply his sound effects."

Playing *Gunstar Heroes* today, it's difficult to imagine how contemporary publishers would react to its hotchpotch design. Of course, Treasure has virtual immunity in this regard, and can apparently still get away with releasing games that defy convention (see 2001's *Freak Out* on the PS2 for a prime example of bizarre game design being smuggled past publishers and out into retail), but this is principally because of Treasure's reputation – the basis of which was laid in *Gunstar Heroes*.

There are initially four stages to play through, but these can be approached in any order. Only after these levels have been completed and the four gems have been collected does *Gunstar Heroes* shift into a linear gear.

One of *Gunstar Heroes*' most inventive stages is the Dice Maze level, where Black beckons the player to his 'strange fortress', inside which is found The Dice Palace. A board game of sorts ensues, with Red and/or Blue throwing a die to move around a board containing spaces that lead to mini-boss fights, free weapons (received in the



» [Mega Drive] Smash Daisaku attempts to cause Red to crash by throwing live soldiers at him. That's not nice.





» [Mega Drive] Being able to shoot in eight directions, even when piloting the Empire's Space Craft, is something of a boon.

"AS DEBUTS GO, GUNSTAR HEROES IS A PHENOMENAL ACHIEVEMENT – FEW DEVELOPERS HAVE MANAGED TO WORK SUCH ASSURED MAGIC IN THEIR INITIAL PROJECTS"

'happy item room'), and fights without weapons (tricky). One space is reserved for the traditional board game penalty of reversing your progress, while the final space sets up a decisive battle with the Yakuza-styled Black, who shows up in his Beat Stepper robot.

"The dice stage is really experimental," Maegawa concurs, "and again it was under the idea of 'anything' being acceptable that we decided to throw a board game into the mix. But none of us are particularly fans of board games as such…"

Other levels are also experimental. For example, the Underground Mine stage is literally 'on rails', with the action switching to a ferocious pace as Red/Blue journey deep underground on high-speed mine carts. With parallel tracks at the top/bottom or left/right (depending on the section of track, progress through the mine can be horizontal or vertical), a jump to midair enables the cart to escape from the magnetic field of one track and enter the field of another, opening the possibility of upside-down mine cart control. Nintendo's recent *Super Mario Galaxy* has been lauded for doing a similar thing – *Gunstar Heroes* was clearly ahead of its time.

As well as experimental play concepts, there are radical and unexpected shifts in style. The first stage plays like a *Contra*-esque platform-shooter – but by the fifth level Red and Blue are piloting the Empire's Space Craft in what is ostensibly Treasure's first attempt at a horizontally scrolling shmup – but still retains the omni-directional shooting system found in all other areas of *Gunstar Heroes*. Again returning to the *Gunstar Heroes* team's enthusiasm for including anything/everything in Treasure's debut production, Maegawa explains how the game came to be such a diverse proposition.

"Because we had this concept of 'anything goes', we decided that if it was fun and interesting, we would put anything into the mix. And because of that *Gunstar Heroes* ended up having shooting, action and fighting elements."

This certainly wasn't development by numbers, though. In playing the game there is no sense that *Gunstar Heroes*' design was at all contrived; in many areas, such as its insistent flitting from automated scrolling scenes to movement-led platforming sections, the game almost seems deliberately prone to challenge and confuse players, rather than sweet-talking them into appreciation of its qualities. It appears to have been the product of a wild burst

» [Mega Drive] The Ancient Ruins stage is deceptive, easing the player in with a *Contra*-style run through a bright environment.





TREASURE BEFORE TREASURE

We ask Maegawa to set the record straight: which games did he and his Treasure team actually work on while they were at Konami? Politely, he refuses, stating that he'd "rather not name specific titles, so as to avoid any potential trouble with Konami." Fair enough. "But I can tell you," he adds, "that I worked on Game Boy, Famicom and Super Famicom games for Konami while I ws there." This didn't quite sate our curiosity, so we did some research, completely unaided by Maegawa by the way, and discovered some rather startling revelations.

From what we've learned from our Japanese sources, Maegawa worked on the following games before founding Treasure: *Dracula Densetsu* (aka *Castlevania: The Adventure,* Game Boy, 1989), *Gun Sight* (aka *Laser Invasion,* NES, 1991), *Rollergames* (NES, 1991), *Bucky O'Hare* (arcade, 1992; NES, 1992).

Other Treasure members such as Yaiman, Han, Iuchi and Nami worked on these Konami titles: *Quarth* (arcade, 1989; MSX, 1990), *Aliens* (arcade, 1990), *Punk Shot* (arcade, 1990), *Akumajou Dracula* (aka *Super Castlevania IV,* Super NES, 1991), *Escape Kids* (arcade, 1991), *The Simpsons* (arcade, 1991), *Axelay* (SNES, 1992), *Contra Spirits* (aka *Super Probotector,* SNES, 1992). Iuchi also went on to do a gig as the level designer for Time Warner Interactive's rather great 1997 *Shinobi* clone *Shinrei Jusatsushi Taroumaru.*



THE MAKING OF

TOUGH BOSSES



Bravoo Man is built like a brick shithouse – or at least, he's been constructed from brick – but his moves are limited to a flying spin and clumsy kick.



Pink and a couple of sidekicks called Kain and Kotaro attempt to stop Red and Blue by blocking their path with the interestingly named Pinky Loader contraption.



Seven Force is piloted by Green, who guides it through seven transformations. Iterations include a golden gun, a blue phoenix, an iron man and a tiger.



This early mid-level boss is easily beaten, and can be attacked from positions on the robot's feet and under its body, as well as from above.



Smash Daisaku challenges Red to a fight on the wings of a helicopter (yes, a helicopter with wings) before making way for his bulkier comrade, Orange, to have a go.



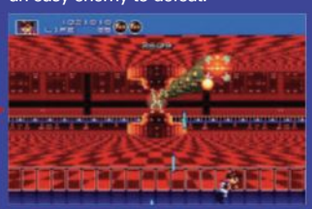
Doctor Black appears as the final boss of his rather strange fortress, having already led Red/Blue through a board game full of challenges.



Smash Daisaku returns, this time with a jetpack and flame-thrower. He's easy to dodge, but he has more stamina. He's all that stands between Red/Blue and the moon.



Seven Force doesn't look quite so threatening when seen in space, but it really zips about the screen and is certainly not an easy enemy to defeat.



The Core Guard System is one of *Gunstars*' few self-explanatory features. It launches a series of attacks, such as chains of orbs and miniature spacecraft.



The final boss series leads up to a fight against the revived Golden Silver robot. Before that, all of the game's main enemies reappear in sequence.



Golden Silver presents *Gunstar Heroes*' final challenge. It's effective to grab and throw him, but it's also essential that you shoot at the four gems to drain Golden Silver's power.



» [Mega Drive] Care for a piece of Gunstar Gum? Never mind in-game advertising – *Gunstar Heroes* did in-game self-promotion.

of creative thinking, and not the result of any focus testing or considerations of marketability. Maegawa confirms Treasure's slightly random and carefree methodology. "We didn't really bother about the details of how each stage was being developed," he says, "but we produced each scene with a different attitude, which led to there being plenty of variety in the game. I feel that as a result of this approach the overall balance came out really well."

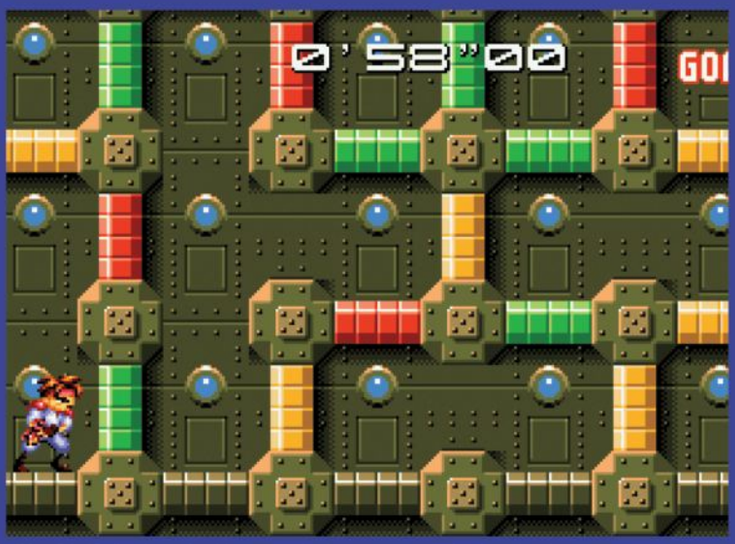
Variety was also seen in the game's weapon system, which starts from a base of four weapon types (Force, Lightning, Chaser and Fire) but expands to 14 variations via the mixing of different weapon types. Red/Blue can choose one weapon initially, but have space in their primitive 'inventory' (displayed at the top of the screen) to hold two weapons simultaneously. Each of these weapons can be used in isolation, if so desired, or the two can be used in combination; the three choices on offer from each brace of weapons can be cycled through mid-game by holding A and B. It's an effective system, encouraging tactical use of weapons. Rather than simply give the player a procession of increasingly powerful weapons, Treasure decided to spread *Gunstar*'s range of attacking options in a more imaginative way.

"We developed the weapon combination system like that," says Maegawa, "because we wanted players to discover their own ways of getting through stages, and for them to have lots of different experiences according to which weapons they were using on which levels. The weapons become different when you go from Easy mode to Expert mode, as well."

As with many subsequent Treasure titles, *Gunstar Heroes* is not a huge game when measured in terms of how long it takes to get to the credits – it can be played through in an hour, if you're good – but it presents such a wealth of diverse ideas during play that it manages to project an unfeasibly large personality. This is a game, which, once played, cannot be forgotten.

The most memorable scenes in *Gunstar Heroes* are probably its boss encounters (it soon became apparent that boss design was one of Treasure's strengths, as evidenced by such incredible sights as that of the Creator in *Radiant Silvergun* and the interplanetary conclusion to *Sin & Punishment*), which span the gamut from a brick man in the form of Bravoo Man to a midget called Minion Soldier. Maegawa recognises the importance of these characters to the game's enduring appeal, citing the impact of *Gunstar Heroes*' bosses on





» [Mega Drive] Red's rather confused; he was sure that there was some way of getting to the exit…



» [Mega Drive] Mini-bosses are peppered throughout every level of *Gunstar Heroes*.

"WE FELT THAT THE WORD 'LUNATIC' WAS A PERFECT FIT TO CONVEY THE EXHILARATION OF OUR GAME, WITH ALL THE EXPLOSIONS AND DETONATIONS; BUT THAT DIDN'T GO DOWN TOO WELL WITH SEGA OF AMERICA" MASATO MAEGAWA ON THE NAMING OF GUNSTAR HEROES

players who make the effort to explore all corners of the game. "As you might expect," he says, "my favourite boss is probably the famous one: Seven Force. The seven transformations are absolutely worth seeing."

Describing features of *Gunstar Heroes* as being 'worth seeing' is wholly appropriate in a game whose overarching theme is ultimately less to do with story and more obviously centred on the fireworks of destruction. 'Anything goes' might be one recurring ideal, but the notion that 'more is more' also had an influence on Treasure's work here, and the studio's fondness for creating spectacular set pieces has never gone away. Maegawa retains a childish appreciation of pyrotechnics, along with an understanding of the power of scale.

"My favourite aspects of *Gunstar Heroes* are the way in which scenes and stages become progressively more expansive," Maegawa smiles, "and the sense of exhilaration that comes from seeing so many explosions! I think that was really refreshing for many players."

Time has been kind to *Gunstar Heroes*, and it deserves its place in the highest rank of Treasure's consistently excellent output over the past 20 years. It even received a highly enjoyable sequel for the Game Boy Advance. As debuts go, it's a phenomenal achievement – few developers have managed to work such assured magic in their initial projects. For Maegawa and friends, the creation of *Gunstar Heroes* was a cathartic experience, with their newly acquired independence fuelling their enthusiasm, and creating a super game. We ask Maegawa if Treasure faced any difficulties as independent developer.

"There isn't any particularly trying episode that I can recall from the development period – it all went really smoothly. But as we'd just established Treasure, we were of one mind in thinking, 'At last we can make the exact kind of game that we love.' We were completely absorbed in making our game and all thoroughly enjoying the project. That's what I remember foremost about making *Gunstar Heroes*."



» [Mega Drive] Green realises how stupid he's been and decides to make amends with a kamikaze attack on Golden Silver.



» [Mega Drive] Under siege from all directions and yet still in with a fighting chance.



THE CLASSIC GAME

STREETS OF RAGE 2

The peace is broken once more. Mr X is back and this time he's hit Axel were it hurts: in the Adam. Yes, the once peaceful, apparently crime-free city of New York is again thrown into upset after one third of a friendship is mercilessly locked in a room. Don't panic though as the remaining two thirds – accompanied by a token wrestler-type character and a rollerblading ten year old – set out to save their captured comrade and bring some order back to all the chaos.

It might sound like the most clichéd of action-film plots, but *Streets Of Rage 2* is a game that lets two people throw a punk rocker into an arcade machine of itself and eat apples off the floor. Such a blatant display of ill-hygiene and acts of ironic vandalism are just two elements what make walking the streets of rage so awesome. Still not convinced? Read on…



Axel

Axel is the easiest character to get to grips with and to finish the game within an hour of purchase. This is basically down to his potent special attacks – particularly his Ground Upper (see Best Special boxout) – which make easy work of most to all enemies.



Blaze

Dance Teacher and ex-plod Blaze Fielding is the fastest of the four characters. As well as being agile and quick, Blaze also boasts fast weapon attacks – particularly with the knife, where she stabs and swipes with one tap of the fire button – so is one of the best all-rounders in the game.



Skate

Adam's kid brother Eddie 'Skate' Hunter is the most agile of the four characters on offer, but he's also the weakest. He's the only character in the game that can perform a dash, but he seriously struggles when wielding the larger weapons in the game.



Max

Max's biggest downfall is that he's too slow. Ninjas, kickboxers, bikers and anything that owns an animation will cause him all kind of problems. This is counteracted somewhat by Sega blessing him with the strongest moves in the game – particularly his devastating Atomic Drop.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS



WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?

Where's part 4 Sega?

There are many reasons – the thumping score by Yuzo Koshiro and the awesome visuals, the pace of the game, the cool-looking bosses and brilliantly themed stages – why *Streets Of Rage* can be seen as a classic. The SNES bagged itself a home port of *Final Fight*, but it was a load of lazy crap. Despite not looking as refined as its Capcom rival, *Streets Of Rage* let two players work together to smash up a load of gangly goons. It's also shockingly violent (for its day), with stabbings, women in leather and fishnets attacking you with electric-charged bullwhips and some brutal moves that included administering several quick knees to the face.



BEST CHARACTER

Not Max

Looking like he hailed from a circus of strong men and with a pointlessly slow and laborious quick attack, we're all in agreement that Max is by far the worst character. The mantle for the best character though is a close toss up between Axel – for his balance, but losing points (not of his own doing) for looking like every other videogame character to ever throw a punch – and Skate for his speed and being able to beat up people seven times his Body Mass Index, but losing style kudos for dressing like Pac-Man. These pros and cons are just too equal to try to split hairs over, so we're going to bottle out and give the award to Blaze Fielding instead.



BEST BOSS

Grand Uppercut: Forward, Forward, B

Axel's Grand Uppercut is good for three reasons: first, it looks pretty darn impressive; second, it doesn't sap any of your energy if it connects with something; and third, it makes your Mega Drive say 'Grand Upper' (or 'Bare Knuckle' in the Japanese version) in a demonic tongue. The Grand Upper is easy to pull off and stupidly effective against enemies charging towards you. The actual move involves watching Axel scrape his knuckles along the pavement to create a concentrated charge of friction, with which he can then use to melt the face off of any person with the name Signal.



BEST MOVE

Shiva

Shiva is Mr X's mysterious underling and martial-arts muscle. Because he seems to have this pungent air of sensible about him (owing to the fact that he looks relatively normal in comparison to everyone else you've had to fight up until that point), you can tell right away that he's going to put up a bit of a fight. Strutting around calmly, draped entirely in black, Shiva's entire move arsenal consists of potent windmills and posing. Also, he can pretty much break all of your attack combos and he consistently threatens to make your life a complete misery with his annoyingly fatal 'Final Crash' move.



BEST STAGE

Stage 2: Construction Bridge

Starting on a street, then moving into a bar, to a baseball stadium and then to a theme park, on to a jungle section, a factory and a well-guarded HQ – to say *Streets Of Rage 2* is a boisterous beast is no understatement. But it's the bridge section that is the best stage. Crossing said bridge though is tough – it's full of guys on scrambler bikes trying to smite you with pipes – but by heck it's a lot of fun. And when you cross the bridge you end the stage in a construction site where you fight a guy with a jetpack called Jet. You're then forced to fight him using pretty much just flying kicks. Yes, it makes the fight look cheap, but it's the best way.



STANDOUT MOMENT

Co-op – two pads are better than none

To say that the true brilliance of *Streets Of Rage 2* becomes apparent exactly two minutes into plugging the stringy end of a second control pad into your Mega Drive and plonking what looks like a plastic kidney into the hands of a friend is no lie. *Streets Of Rage 2* contains one of the most comprehensive move lists of any side-scrolling beat-'em-up, leaving plenty of room for you and a pal to experiment with the action. Fighting for health-apples, flipping over adversaries like a pair of gymnasts and launching a Big Ben into a group of Talks, was truly one of the best multiplayer times to be had on the Mega Drive.



What the mags said... ages ago

Mean Machines

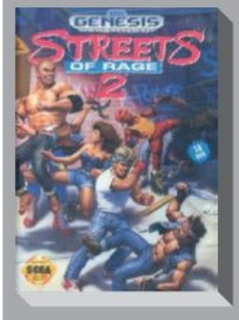
"Let's make no bones about it, *Streets Of Rage 2* is the greatest sequel we've seen for ages and is certainly the best-scrolling beat-'em-up ever to hit a home console."

Mega

"The best beat-'em-up on the Mega Drive. Just make sure you use the *hard* setting with no continues – it's for your own good"

What we think

Yup, certainly does. *Streets Of Rage 2*, along with *Sonic 2*, are the greatest Sega sequels ever made. And yes *Mean Machines*, it still can be considered the best-scrolling beat-'em-up to hit a home console – name one better, it's impossible.

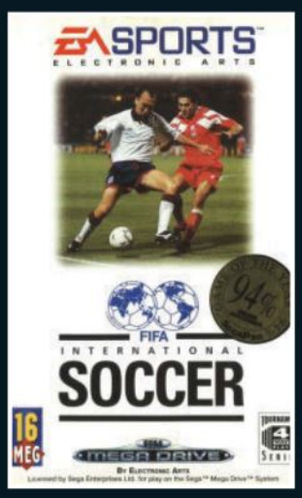


IN THE KNOW

- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- **PUBLISHER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** GAME GEAR, SMS

THE MAKING OF

FIFA INTERNATIONAL SOCCER



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** EXTENDED PLAY PRODUCTIONS/EA CANADA

» **RELEASED:** 1993

» **GENRE:** SPORTS

While all the cool kids are playing FIFA 14, with his Mega Drive nestled under his arm Stuart Hunt calls for Matt Webster, the man who helped kick off the franchise 20 years ago

For many, the run up to *FIFA*'s annual release is seen as the biggest event in the videogame calendar; one that generates a global pre-season warm-up comprising excitement, fanaticism, competition against its long-standing rival in the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series and, hopefully, cause for celebration. A unique sports series, then, as it succeeds in capturing not just the action and emotions that occur on the pitch but also off it. Now seen as one of the biggest and most successful franchises in videogames, this month we look back at how this football legend was born.

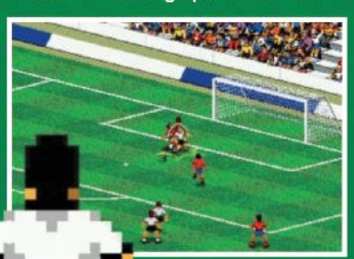
Throughout the late Eighties and early Nineties EA had seen huge success releasing sports titles for the Genesis in the US, most notably with the popular *John Madden Football* and *NHL Hockey* franchises. Often regarded as a key title for Sega, the *Madden* games put an early chink in Nintendo's seemingly impenetrable armour and ultimately helped Sega to win majority share of the North American games market. Unsurprisingly, then, it was the success of these two sports series, combined with the fast growth of the console in the US and Europe, that would inform EA's decision to put a Mega Drive football game into production.

At the time, EA Sports was known as EASN (Electronic Arts Sports Network) and was being led by EA in San Mateo. It was here that a prototype football game was created utilising the *John Madden* engine, but its progress didn't get very far. Football wasn't as popular stateside as it was elsewhere in the world, and the project wasn't getting the attention it needed. With development moving slowly, EA enlisted the help of Brit Matt Webster to help get things back on track.

Matt, who is credited as associate producer on the game, was working at the company's newly established UK studio and began this most important of assignments by putting together a fresh new design idea for the game. And fresh it most certainly was. While most football videogames at the time adopted either side-on or top-down viewpoints, as utilised by *Kick Off* and *Sensible Soccer*, Matt settled on a rather unusual isometric perspective to represent the game. Considering that neither *John Madden Football* nor the *NHL Hockey* series had ever used such a unique viewpoint, top on our list of burning questions to ask Matt was to find out why this perspective was chosen, and whether any others were ever tested.

"In truth, the isometric viewpoint was selected partly because it was so different," Matt told us. "But mostly because I thought that we'd be able to get a better game out of it. I had pulled together the original design and vision for the game, and we were working with a couple of guys



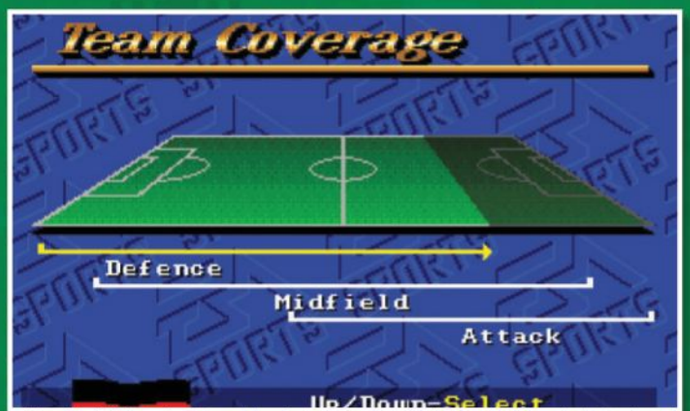




up in Widnes. They had a cobbled together Mega Drive development set built off a Commodore Amiga. We'd asked them to look at the pseudo-3D like *Madden,* the side-scroller that was most popular at the time, and an isometric view. When we looked at the prototypes running, the isometric was just the clear winner. When you looked at them together it was a no-brainer."

Once the isometric viewpoint was settled on, work began on putting together a prototype, and it was shortly after this that EA would decide to move production to EA Canada (EAC) in Vancouver.

Located in Burnaby, British Columbia, and currently employing around 2,000 staff, EA Canada is EA's oldest and largest studio, and the place where every main *FIFA* game has been developed. The massive campus, which houses three production studios, is equipped with the latest motion and facial capture technology to ensure that player animations look as believable as possible and nary a single hair on Rooney's newly fertilised head looks out of place.



» [Mega Drive] *FIFA* featured a welcome dollop of customisation. You could adjust your team's formation, their tactics and even the amount of space they covered on the pitch.

"In truth, the isometric viewpoint was selected partly because it was so different"

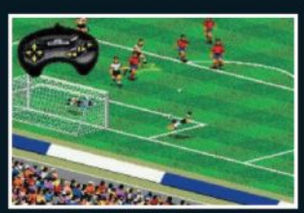
"EAC was fairly new to EA, created when EA acquired [Distinctive Software] in Vancouver," remembers Matt. "There was an experienced console team there ready to go, and we figured that we could get development running quicker if we moved it there. So we took the difficult decision to cease the development with the guys in Widnes and moved it to Vancouver. These decisions aren't easy, but both of these guys ended up accepting internal positions with the newly expanding UK Studio. The remote development was challenging, but nightly calls and weekly deliverables meant that we could stay on top of the development. The fact is that the team at EAC were very strong, experienced already with EA's amazing development tools that existed on the Sega console, so progress was fast."

Despite the obvious stresses that come with long-distance working relationships, with a fresh and innovative new plan of attack and a passionate captain leading the

...AND OFF THE PITCH

LIKE EA'S ESTABLISHED early Mega Drive sports franchises, the presentation throughout *FIFA International Soccer* was exemplary. It allowed players to tweak the rules of play, let you and three friends play together using EA's 'four-way play' adaptor, and featured an innovative action-replay mode that allowed you to stop the action and replay the last few moments of gameplay, among other things. The thought and extra effort made by the EA team to ensure that *FIFA* gave footy fans the complete sports package was undoubtedly a big factor in its success.

Curious as to whether there was anything the team had to drop from the original game, we put the question to Matt. "We ended up cutting out large amounts of variety in the crowd chants," he replied. "The things I remember feeling sorry about was the player-controlled celebration stuff. I really wanted to be able to ram it home when I scored against a friend, but it was great when that went in the following year!"



THE MAKING OF



experienced team of developers, development of EA's isometric football game began to take shape as the EAC team "immersed themselves in the sport" and set about creating an authentic football experience for gamers.

"We started with how the players looked as you controlled them," said Matt. "The isometric view meant that we could get a ton more detail than ever before. I was also able to tune the formation and AI editor, which was linked to where the ball was on the pitch. If the team responded in the right way to where the ball was, then everything flowed together to give a more realistic feel than had gone before. Audio then really came to the fore as we put the crowd chants into a footy game for the first time. The atmosphere really came through."

As well as trying to capture the look and atmosphere of football, the team at EAC also gave careful consideration to how the game would be played. Football games of the time typically assigned one button for passing, lobbing and shooting, but there was often a sense that this was more out of necessity than choice, be it technical limitations on the number of player animations or controller design restricting the number of buttons afforded to players. For *FIFA* the team utilised the power of Sega's 16-bit console and its three-button control pad to incorporate an array of moves into the game. This was something that was especially important to Matt.



» [Mega Drive] Though born and still living in Canada, *FIFA* was conceived in Britain. Doesn't it make you proud?

"As I said, I wanted to be able to do more than just kick the ball. To create moves you need to build up to a shot. I wanted that depth. Being able to see the team responding to the ball and player position, and seeing the action differently to that which had gone before, really showed that we had something more than our competitors. Gave us an edge."

What struck critics and fans most about *FIFA International Soccer* was the high level of presentation in the game, and this has remained a hallmark of the series. Though the player sprites were identical, they were extremely well animated, able to perform impressive flying headers, back heels, bicycle kicks and theatrical dives. And while the quasi-3D perspective can make it difficult to judge the position of the ball at times, the viewpoint did offer a good playing field for those players who liked to pass the ball and think about their approach. Indeed, rather than use whichever player had possession to dash towards the opposition's goal and shoot, *FIFA*'s design and gameplay encouraged players to take a more considered route towards goal. This was something Matt really wanted to instil into the gameplay.

"I felt that you could see more and get a deeper sense of building up a move with the isometric view," he explains. "The competition at the time was very much about twitch control of the way the player interacted with the ball. For me, at the time, I wanted to see across the pitch and have a sense of crossing

"We put the crowd chants in for the first time and the atmosphere really came through"

EVOLUTION OF FIFA

LOOKING BACK AT highlights from the past 20 years of videogaming's most successful football franchise...



1. FIFA International Soccer



2. FIFA Soccer 95



3. FIFA Soccer 96



4. FIFA 97



10. FIFA Football 2003



11. FIFA Football 2004



12. FIFA Football 2005



13. FIFA 06



14. FIFA 07



» [Mega Drive] US sports pundit Ron Barr was *FIFA*'s original face. He was a man of very few words and liked to repeat himself. Probably why he was dropped in *FIFA 95*.

the ball laterally ahead of a player to run on to."

For most of its development the game was known as *EA Soccer* within the walls of EAC. The FIFA licence actually came as a late but vital goal, and is now a badge of honour that the series has proudly worn for 18 years. For many, that close affiliation with football's governing body is what makes *FIFA* the only football game to play.

While the late FIFA affiliation meant that the series didn't really make best use of the licence until the release of *FIFA Soccer 95*, which introduced club teams, authentic kit colours and player names to the mix, securing FIFA's blessing was certainly an important moment for the franchise. It gave EA exclusive use of licensed clubs, kits and player likenesses, and, of course, the leagues – most importantly the English Premiership, which was established around the time that the original *FIFA* was in production. So just how difficult was it to convince FIFA to let EA use the licence for its game at the time?

"It wasn't hard at all," admits Matt. "I did a bit of research and found a name at FIFA of somebody connected with external relations, made the call and then passed it on to our marketing department to close out. At the time, FIFA wasn't a commercial heavyweight as it's become now. It was a natural addition to the EA Sports line-up so, in a way, having NHL and the NFL relationships helped us."

To date there have been 19 releases in the main *FIFA* series and around 30 spin-off games, with some of the latter falling inside the successful *FIFA Street* and *FIFA Manager* franchises. Selling more than 100 million copies worldwide, *FIFA* is now one of the bestselling videogame franchises ever, and in all that time has remained in the care of EA Canada.

Now a senior producer at Criterion Games, a subsidiary of EA, Matt no longer has anything to do with the *FIFA* series, but there's no doubt it's a series that he is incredibly proud to have played such a key role in creating.

Noticing that we're entering the last few moments of injury time, we therefore finish up by asking Matt for his thoughts on the last 18 years of the franchise and why he thinks it remains so popular today. "It's retained its easy-to-pick-up roots, something that a number of years ago it was derided for, but it's important that anyone can feel like they can get a game and score a goal. It's authentic, looks amazing and plays beautifully. You can't help but be entertained when you play a game. When you watch someone play, it looks like you're watching a real match. The commentary system is a total revelation. I'm in awe of what the team at EAC has achieved over the last [20] years or so with the game. It's remarkable."



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, MEGA DRIVE, SNES
YEAR: 1990

ROAD RASH
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ATARI ST, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, MEGA DRIVE, MEGA-CD
YEAR: 1991

THE NEED FOR SPEED
SYSTEM: 3DO, DOS, PLAYSTATION, SATURN
YEAR: 1994



» [Mega Drive] The *FIFA* series kept the isometric engine for its entire tenure on the Mega Drive. Amazingly, the final release for the system was *FIFA 2000*.



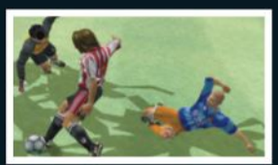
5. FIFA 98: Road To World Cup



6. FIFA 99



7. FIFA 2000



8. FIFA 2001



9. FIFA Football 2002



15. FIFA 08



16. FIFA 09



17. FIFA 10



18. FIFA 11



19. FIFA 14

IMPORT ONLY



AAH! HARIMANADA

» If football's a funny old game then, by comparison, sumo must be a hilariously ancient one. Stuart Hunt doesn't have the build or the hair for sumo, but does have pretty good dexterity and patience, two things you'll need to play this obscure Mega Drive fighter

INFO

- **» PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **» DEVELOPER:** MEGASOFT
- **» FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
- **» ALSO ON:** GAME BOY, GAME GEAR
- **» GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **» RELEASED:** 1993
- **» EXPECT TO PAY:** £25 ($55)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro



SYUSSEI OOZUMOU
RELEASED: **1984**
This is earliest sumo game we could find is this arcade game by *Double Dragon* makers Technos. With nice detailed visuals and an intuitive by frantic button mashing grappling system, it's a fairly solid recreation of the sport.

▼ Modern

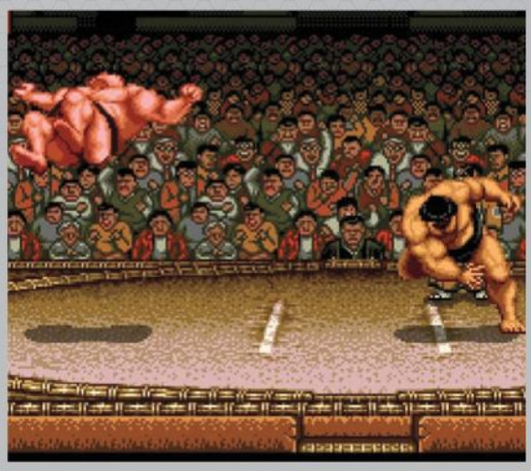


WWE '13
RELEASED: **2012**
Coming up empty when trying to find a modern sumo videogame, we copped out and went with a western wrestling game instead. *WWE '13* is the latest entry in the popular *Smackdown* versus *Raw* series, we've not played it so can't tell you if it's any good.

The sport of sumo wrestling is grossly under-represented in videogames. In fact, this month's title is the first we've come by – though we're sure there are more out there. Actually, let us don our research hats and go investigating… In the meantime, here are some sumo-related facts to keep you entertained, some of which may or may not be true.

1. Sumo is the national sport of Japan. 2. It dates back to the Edo period of Japan and was played to entertain the Gods. 3. The game is traditionally played by large men in loincloths, each of which is worth thousands of pounds. 4. There is an alternative version of the sport called Suitmo which is played by tall skinny men wearing sharp black tailored suits.

Right, sorry about that, we're back. Well, would you believe it, it turns out that there are actually a lot more sumo videogames than we thought, around 20 in fact, and most have appeared on Nintendo consoles and didn't see release outside of Japan. The one we want to draw your attention to is *Aah! Harimanada*, which appeared on the Mega Drive in Japan and was based on a popular manga and anime. It was also developed by Megasoft, developer of one of the Mega Drive's greatest action games – *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master.*



» [Mega Drive] The human hammer throw competition was in full swing, first prize: a loincloth change.

There are three versions of *Aah! Harimanada*, one for the Game Boy and another for the Game Gear. The Mega Drive version is often criticised by westerners for being ferociously tough. As such, there are many who will warn you off it. And initially we were in agreement. However, after discovering who was behind the game we decided to stick with it, and were glad we did. Simply spamming the fire buttons won't get you off the second bout, but with only three buttons to worry about, *Aah! Harimanada*'s combat system is simple to figure out, and when you do it gets a helluva lot more entertaining.

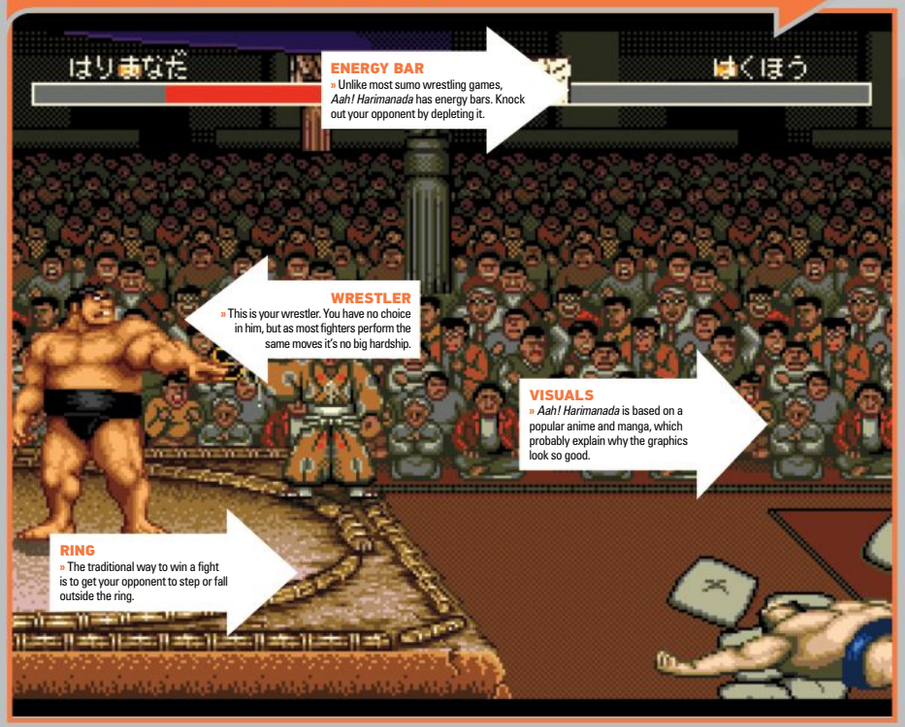


» [Mega Drive] The wrestlers can perform special moves, like this one here. Clearly the developers weren't aiming to create a factually accurate sumo sim.



» [Mega Drive] We're not going to say what this guy's cheeks and nose look like; we're way more mature than that.

GO DEEPER A Sumo Lesson



"With only three buttons on the Mega Drive, the game's combat system is relatively simple to figure out"

Aah! Harimanada takes dramatic licence with the sport it's based on by playing more like a one-on-one fighter in the mould of *Street Fighter II*. The wrestlers have energy bars and special moves, and matches can be won by pushing or throwing your opponent out of the ring or depleting their energy bar to get a knock out. The game also has an air of *Punch-Out!!* too as you're only given the choice of one fighter, and you must help him climb the ranks of various sumo wrestling circuits (that's the impression we got, anyway). Before fights, a screen flashes up showing the stats of you and your opponent, though as it's all written in Japanese, that's probably only useful if you speak the language.

As we said, the control system is spread across three buttons, which makes it pretty simple to grasp. You have a light attack, heavy attack and a grapple which can be used to pull and push your opponent. Depending on the opponent, some fights can be won by madly mashing away at the two attack buttons, but other wrestlers are just too strong and will quickly shave chunks off your fighter's energy bar if you decide to go toe-to-toe with them. Against these stronger opponents, it is best to block their attacks (blocking is performed by pressing the D-pad away from your opponent) and force them to the edge of the mat. Initiating a grapple there will cause both men to lock horns and by madly smashing away at the buttons you will hopefully throw your opponent out of the ring. Some of the heavier set fighters are difficult (maybe even impossible) to defeat in this way though, and in this instance the best tactic is generally to exploit their slow speed and just go for a KO.

Though the fighting does get repetitive and there are a lot of opponents to face (we got to about thirty, and it seemed like there were more), *Aah! Harimanada* has a real addictive quality. This is basically owing to the random skills and abilities of the opponents, the tense and unpredictable nature of the sport and the fact that fights can be over in seconds. Add some lovely looking chunky arcade visuals (though the music and sound FX are not all that great) and *Aah! Harimanada* is by far the best sumo wrestling videogame we've played. [It's the *only* sumo wrestling videogame we've played -Ed]





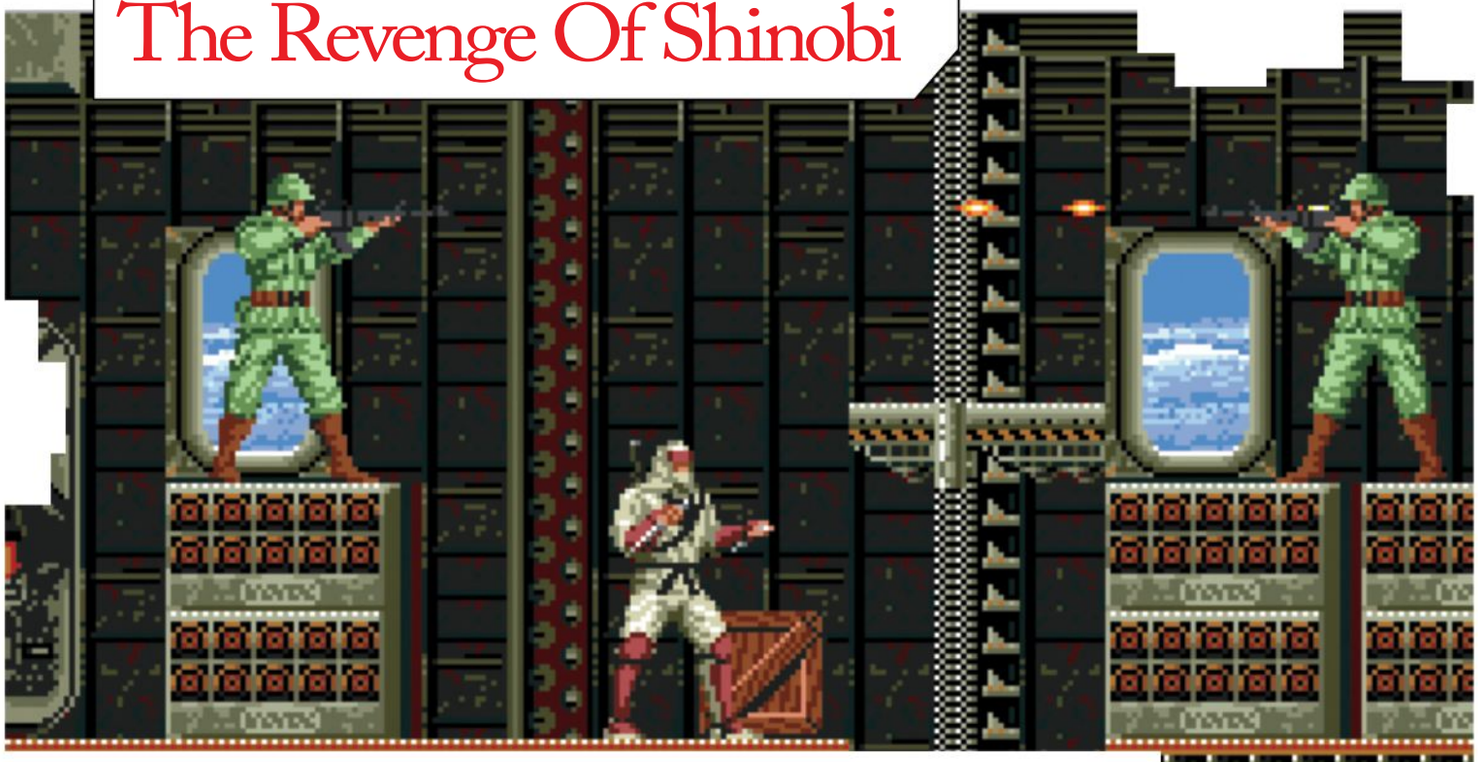
CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



STREET FIGHTER II (PLAYING AS E. HONDA)

» It's obviously not sumo wrestling but as we're struggling to find any sumo wrestling videogame that was released in Europe (do get in touch if you can find one, there's some random bit of office tat in it for you) just play *Street Fighter II* and select E. Honda. With special moves and energy bars, *Aah! Harimanada* feels a little bit *Street Fighter* anyway.

The Revenge Of Shinobi



Instant Expert

Due to Sega cheekily borrowing the likenesses of various pop culture icons for many of the game's end-of-level guardians, five slightly different iterations of the game have found release.

The Revenge Of *Shinobi* was released in 1989. It was directed by creator Noriyoshi Ohba with Shizuoka Taro (*Space Harrier II*) working as lead programmer.

The game's revered soundtrack was written by Yuzo Koshiro. Working freelance for Sega at the time, he went on to compose for a clutch of Sega classics, most notably the *Streets Of Rage* series.

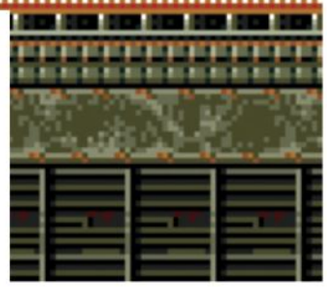
There have been 13 *Shinobi* games in total, but Joe has only appeared in six of them. This tally includes the Western version of MD *Shadow Dancer*, which substituted out Joe's son for Joe.

The series has seen Joe's son, Hayate, and Joe's grandson (who is also named Joe) appear as central characters.

In 2002, THQ and Sega released a Game Boy Advance game titled *The Revenge Of Shinobi*. Despite what its title insinuates, it is neither a port nor a follow up to the Mega Drive game.

The Revenge Of Shinobi did find its way to arcades courtesy of Sega's Mega-Tech arcade board, which was based on Mega Drive hardware.

With five iterations, ninjitsu spells and no shortage of memorable bosses, Stuart Hunt dons a white Shinobi Shozoku and pieces together everything you need to know about Joe Mushashi's second, and best, mission



That *The Revenge Of Shinobi* is still considered by many to be one of the best action games to ever find release on the Mega Drive is a true testament to its brilliance. Released over 20 years ago, some six months or so after the Mega Drive's official launch in Japan, Joe Musashi's second adventure (entitled *Super Shinobi* in Japan) has gone on to become one of the machine's most enduring titles, and serves as conclusive proof that the best games don't necessarily come to us towards the end of a console generation.

Released in the wake of *Space Harrier* and *Super Thunderblade* – two pretty lacklustre Sega Mega Drive arcade sequels – *The Revenge Of Shinobi* came to effortlessly leave its mark on Mega Drive owners. This was largely thanks to its canny blend of arcade action, its jaw-dropping visuals, having one of the most memorable videogame soundtracks of all time and also for some cheeky unlawful impersonating and sometimes blatant use of a few well-established pop culture icons for its enemies and bosses, which forced the developer to make a series of revisions to the game to ensure they avoided litigation (turn the page to find out more).

It may surprise some of you to learn that the most recent revision of the game occurred as late as last year when the game was unshackled from copyright handcuffs, which was due to its inclusion of Spider-Man (which Sega no longer holds the videogame rights to – it's now Activision), and saw its first downloadable release through Nintendo's Virtual Console service, marking the fifth and very likely last incarnation of the game to find release.

Out with the old, in with the new

With its history rooted in the short-frills nature of arcade gaming, *The Revenge Of Shinobi* can be seen as one of the first – and arguably best – examples of Sega daring to do something a little different with one of its established arcade brands. The game was directed and overseen by *Shinobi* creator Noriyoshi Ohba, who, with the help of his small team, set about pushing the franchise in a subtle new direction. That's not to say *The Revenge Of Shinobi* eschews its arcade heritage, rather it cleverly carries over the iconic parts from the original coin-op (the use of magic, the many Western pop culture influences and memorable bosses) but omits those elements that feel inherent to arcade gaming (having no health bar, simplistic level structure and gameplay). In doing this Sega created a game that felt bigger, better and more suited to console gaming, while at the same time it offered a true showcase of the impressive technical capabilities of its new 16-bit machine.

For the benefit of those not familiar with the series, *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s story followed on

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of The Revenge Of Shinobi. How many have you seen?



» Joe Musashi



» Blue Lobster



» Infantry Grunt



» Zeed Ninja - Wings



» Purple Phoenix



» Zeed Ninja - Green



» Kasumi



» Doppelgänger - Batman



» Doppelgänger - Devilman



» The Terminator



» The Terminator - Cyborg



» Infantry Grunt - Grenadier



» Shadow Dancer



» Pink Dragon



» Red Dragon



» Flamethrower Grunt

» Attack Dog



» Rambo



» Shogun - Red



» Blue Dragon



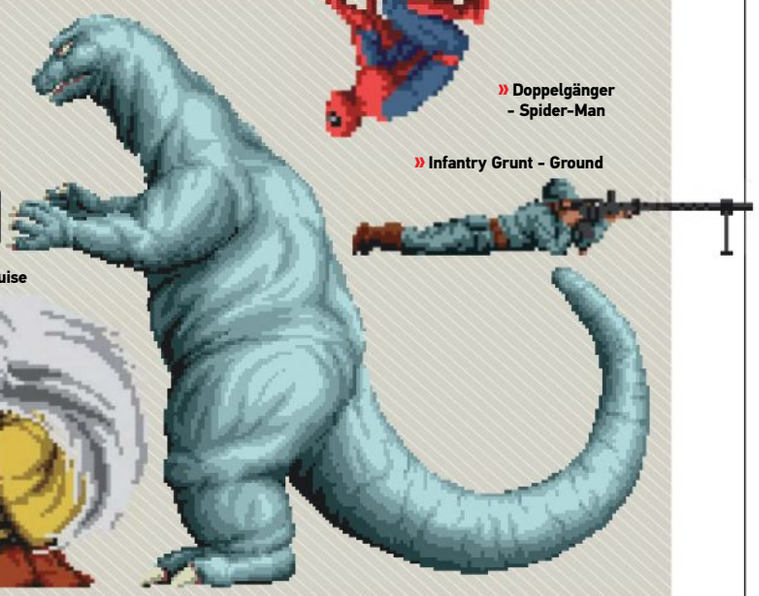
» Shogun - Blue



» Zeed Ninja - Black



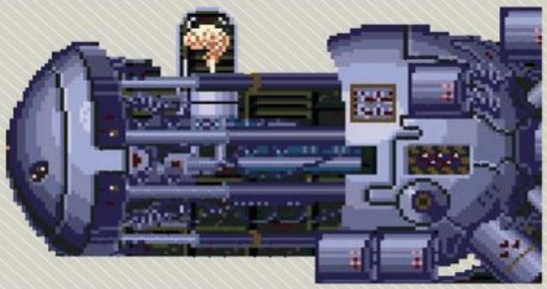
» Kasumi - Disguise



» Godzilla

» Doppelgänger - Spider-Man

» Infantry Grunt - Ground



» Supercomputer



» Neo Zeed Leader

directly from the original. It saw the return of the series' recurring antagonist, a shady criminal organisation known as Zeed, that decides to exact revenge on Joe after he foils their plans at the end of the first game. Newly reformed, now under the slightly flashier-sounding name Neo Zeed, they attack Joe's Oboro ninja clansman, kill his master and kidnap his girlfriend and bride-to-be, Naoko. Understandably, Joe is left a little annoyed by all of this, so he sets out on a mission to seek some counter-vengeance by travelling to the Zeed's eight hideouts to defeat its new leaders, put a stop to their new reign of terror and save his girl.



Change is definitely a good thing

The sequel made a number of changes to the existing *Shinobi* template. Perhaps the most noteworthy alteration was the dropping of the previous 'free all the hostages to progress' gameplay. Instead, it was made simpler with Joe having to find and reach the exit to finish the stage. This was made challenging, though, through more intricate level design that included environ-based puzzles and the odd tricky platform section to test players. The game's levels were more varied too, with Joe's mission taking him from idyllic locales in Japan, a dazzling nightclub, the top of a speeding commuter train, and ending in a well-fortified marine base. This sense of variety bled into other areas of the game too, with Joe given a much deeper combat system to play with.





While he kept his shurikens and katana (which he uses for close-quarters combat) from the first game, his ninjitsu spells were now split between offensive and defensive attacks. Players were also forced to conserve shurikens (Joe had an unlimited reserve in the first game), which also helped to imbue a subtle sense of strategy.

As well these various gameplay tweaks, the sequel also boasted better visuals through its great use of the Mega Drive's powerful M68000 processor, and came packaged with what many regard as one of the single greatest videogame soundtracks ever. Written by famed videogame composer Yuzo Koshiro, who later composed equally resplendent scores for the *Streets Of Rage* games and *Beyond Oasis (The Story Of Thor)*, the sublime soundtrack to the game is a real audio treat, and helps to further cement *The Revenge Of Shinobi*'s status as a true videogame classic and the very best episode in the series.





» [Mega Drive] Certain stages revert back to the dual-plane mechanic utilised in the original *Shinobi* coin-op.

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...



"One of the most outstanding games on the Mega Drive... The graphics are exquisite, the music superb, and the gameplay out of this world!"

- **MEAN MACHINES** 1990

Twin Galaxies High Scores

NTSC
- **NAME:** ANTONIO R. FILHO
- **POINTS:** 1,070,600

PAL
- **NAME:** ANDREW PETE MEE
- **POINTS:** 37,600

NTSC
- **NAME:** DANIEL C TEIXEIRA
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 16.13 MINS

PAL
- **NAME:** ASHLEY JACKSON
- **FASTEST COMPLETION:** 26:03 MINS

Joe's Ninja Arsenal

As well as his katana sword, Joe's not short of some fancy ninja armaments and spells to aid him on his revenge mission



»Shurikens /Throwing Knives
Joe's standard long-range weapons; conserving them is vital.



»POW
Increases the power of shurikens/ throwing knives so they can break through enemy defences.



»Ikazuchi
A thunder spell that surrounds Joe with lightning bolts to protect him from enemy attacks.



»Karyu
A spell from the first game. It causes dragons made of flames to rise from the ground and attack all foes.



»Fushin
Gives Joe enhanced agility to get around the game's tricky platform sections.



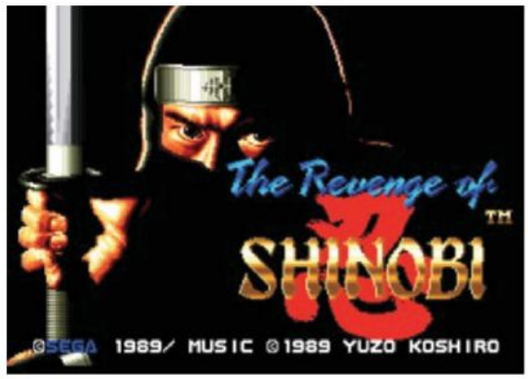
»Mijin
This offensive spell causes Joe to explode, attacking everything on screen. This is at the cost of a life.

Memorable Moments

Our favourite bits from The Revenge Of Shinobi

Flashy flash screen

The game's title screen shows a picture of martial arts actor, Sonny Chiba, and is taken from the television series *Kage No Gundan*. Oddly, it gives the impression that Sonny is seen dressed in a black Shinobi Shozoku, despite the fact Joe's attire is white.





Scene setting

The intro offers us our first true snippet of information about Joe's past. He's from a clan of ninjas known as the Oboro and was due to wed Naoko. That was before Neo Zeed kidnapped her, attacked his clan and murdered his master.



Whiter than white

TROS marks the first time in the series that we see Joe wearing his lustrous white Shinobi Shozoku. It's certainly a far more striking costume than the boring grey and yellow number from the first game.



Joe be nimble

It's fair to say that, in the original *Shinobi*, Joe wasn't the most agile of ninjas. This point was addressed in the sequel, where Joe was given a handy but tricky-to-perform double-jump that enabled him to navigate around the levels easier.



Spell casting

While Joe's Ninjitsu spells were in the first game, Sega was starting to think a lot harder about how it could better implement them in the sequel. It stumbled on incorporating defensive, as well as offensive, spells in the game.



Panic at the disco

Perhaps the most memorable boss battle in the game is the fight against the yellow *Shadow Dancer* ninja in a nightclub at the end of the second stage. An inspired mix of visual effects and music make this a standout moment.



Sonic Boom

The soundtrack is widely considered to be one of the best videogame scores of all time. It's a joyous blend of emotive Japanese compositions and techno beats, and serves as another fitting example of the series' 'East meets West' theme.



A visual treat

With its nicely detailed characters and variety of levels that made brilliant use of the Mega Drive's parallax scrolling capabilities, it's easy to see why the game became so popular on its release. This or *Altered Beast*? No contest.



Unlicensed to kill

TROS is famed for its unauthorised use of various pop culture icons in the game, of which include Godzilla, Spider-Man and Batman. When their respective owners found out, Sega was forced to alter the offending sprites.



Getting in a muddle

The levels in the game are larger than those in the prequel and many contain subtle puzzle or platformer elements. The game concludes with a tough final stage that sees Joe getting lost in a labyrinth inside Neo Zeed's marine hideout.



Happy endings

The final boss fight sees Joe racing to defeat the Neo Zeed leader before Naoko, who's trapped in a cage, is crushed by the lowering stone ceiling. It's a dramatic conclusion to the game, and a final and fitting test of skill for any *Shinobi* fan.

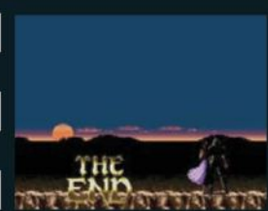
There are two endings to The Revenge Of Shinobi - good and bad. The good ending is widely considered one of the hardest videogame challenges, and is your reward for defeating the Neo Zeed leader before the ceiling flattens Joe's fiancée. If you've managed to see the good ending, well done – you may now change your name to Joe Mushashi by Deed Poll.













THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...
The Revenge Of Shinobi

The Revenge Trail

The Bride's tale of vengeance in *Kill Bill* may have had some epic moments of comic book violence and its fair share of memorable fights, but it pales in comparison to Joe's mission of reckoning. We plot his bloody trail for revenge after his Oboro clansmen are attacked, his master killed and his girlfriend kidnapped.









01 Ibaraki Province, Japan

The first stage plonks Joe in familiar ninja surroundings. Featuring bamboo thickets and shoin-zukuri architecture, Joe must battle ninjas and attack dogs to reach The House Of Confusion – which, oddly, isn't all that confusing when you arrive there. With switches and a hidden underground passageway, it demonstrates straight away the subtle gameplay changes Sega made to the gameplay.

Boss: Blue Lobster



This boss may only have one tedious attack but his tough samurai armour makes him no pushover. His weak spot is his head, which he leaves open every time he makes his attack. Make easy work of him by repeatedly dodging his sword attack with a timely double-jump shuriken spray attack – just ensure you've been conserving those shurikens.

02 Tokyo

The first section is probably one of the trickiest in the game. Set against a canyon, Joe must rely on his ninja agility to get around by jumping between logs as they travel down a waterfall. The second is simple straightforward side-scrolling beat-'em-up action, taking place on the dark streets and rooftops of Tokyo where martial artists and female assassins dressed as nuns try to take him down.

Boss: Shadow Dancer



This stage ends in an impressive-looking nightclub where Joe must face off against the Shadow Dancer, a yellow ninja who can create a trail of doppelgangers of himself like some kind of human ninja centipede. Each doppelganger takes one hit to kill, and when he's down to his true form he blends into his dark surroundings like a chameleon.

03 Military Base

Enemies on this level include armed guards, more attack mutts and flamethrower-wielding *Rambo* lookalikes – although these are substituted for bald guys in later versions. This section is notable for being the first of two stages in the game that pay homage to the dual-plane mechanic from the first *Shinobi*, with Joe jumping between the foreground and background to take out his enemies. The second section is set aboard an airship, and Joe must be mindful of the ship's airlocks, which pull him out the stage at the cost of a life.



Boss: Supercomputer

One of the more unusual bosses in the game is this large laser-guarded supercomputer, which is running from a human brain. The brain serves as the rather obvious weak spot of this boss, and must have been extracted from a nosey idiot ninja as it keeps popping in and out of its protective metal casing to take a look at the action, which is Joe's time to strike.

04 Detroit

This stage takes place in the rundown-looking Detroit, and has obviously been inspired by Paul Verhoeven's bleak vision of the city in *Robocop*. The second stage, which takes place inside some kind of automobile manufacturing factory, also riffs off *The Terminator*, with Joe avoiding crushing machinery as he works through the level's maze-like design using his ninja agility and the environment to find the exit.

Boss: The Terminator



Signalling the first of *TROS*'s many litigation-baiting bosses, this familiar-looking muscle man draws things to a memorable close on the fourth stage. With giant chest and sunglasses, this car-tossing boss is clearly based on Arnold Schwarzenegger. However, when he gets hit he slowly turns green with rage like The Incredible Hulk... that is until his skin breaks away to reveal a T-800-style endoskeleton, which then explodes.

06 Chinatown



Similar to the second stage of the Tokyo level, this level sees Joe beating down martial art gangs and more fake nuns through the dimly lit streets of Chinatown. The second section sees Joe fighting ninjas on top of a speeding train while avoiding steel obstructions – get hit once and it wipes out a life.

It's certainly a tense and tricky level to beat, but the setting, coupled with the two-part boss fight that ends this stage, makes it one of the standout levels in the game.

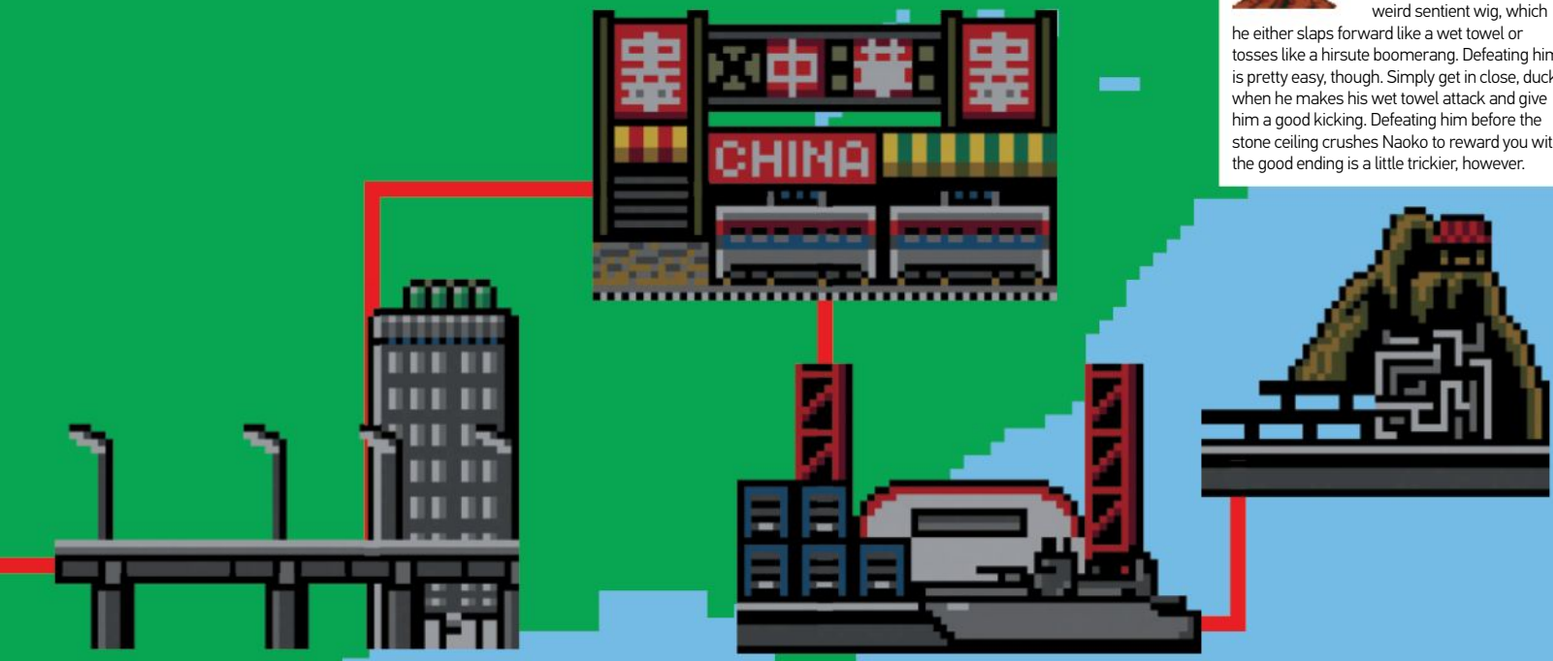
Boss: Spider-Man

Marvel's mouthy web-slinger makes a cameo at the end of the scene, in what is possibly the Mega Drive's first ever WTF moment. Spidey sticks himself to the ceiling and fires down webs to trap Joe, occasionally dropping down to hit him. Sega actually held the licence to Spider-Man when it produced *The Amazing Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin*, so Spidey appears in every version of the game bar the most recent VC release. His proper Marvel signed-off appearances, though, are found in versions 1.02 onwards – distinguished by a copyright message on the start screen.

Boss: Batman/Devilman

To at least keep things fair, Sega decided not to discriminate between the two big comic book publishers, so after Spidey has been beaten in comes Bats to finish the fight. The Caped Crusader only appears in version 1.0. From 1.01 onwards Sega replaced him with Devilman, a character based on a Japanese manga who actually went on to appear in two of his own videogames.





08 Neo Zeed Marine Stronghold

This is it – the final stage of the game. Yet for all its promise and cinematic buildup it ends on a bit of a frustrating note. The first section is very similar to the New York docklands stage, and sees Joe battling to reach Neo Zeed's heavily guarded stronghold. Then, once inside, he is greeted by a perplexing maze of entrances and exits, and must find the correct doorway that will lead him to his betrothed.



Boss: Neo Zeed Leader

The Neo Zeed leader is basically just an evil troll doll, attacking Joe with his weird sentient wig, which he either slaps forward like a wet towel or tosses like a hirsute boomerang. Defeating him is pretty easy, though. Simply get in close, duck when he makes his wet towel attack and give him a good kicking. Defeating him before the stone ceiling crushes Naoko to reward you with the good ending is a little trickier, however.

05 Area Code 818

According this stage's title, this level takes place in California. The first section sees Joe fighting to reach the top of a skyscraper fortified with armed guards and gun emplacements, while the second section (which feels very reminiscent of the first level of *Dragon Ninja*) is set on a freeway. Here, Joe fights nun-dressed assassins and soldiers while avoiding speeding traffic.



Boss: Ballistic Missile

This end boss is a typical *Shinobi* guardian: a giant mode of transportation. This speeding ballistic missile carrier pegs down the freeway and Joe must stop it before it reaches its destination. To do this Joe must destroy the three bulbous weak spots found on its roof. This won't be easy, however, as they're protected by cannons and an electric pulse that travels down the entire length of the carrier.

07 New York

No videogame featuring ninjas would be complete without a stage set in New York, and that's exactly where the penultimate level is set. Weirdly enough, perceptive *Shinobi* fans may notice that this stage looks very similar to the second stage of *Shinobi*. It takes place around the city's docklands, with Joe avoiding a drenching by jumping onto dinghies and bollards. The second part sees Joe inside a container ship full of armed guards. Wonder what they could be hiding in there that's so important?



Boss: Godzilla

It's Godzilla, of course. Use his sluggish speed to your advantage by drawing him to one end of the screen, attacking his head while avoiding his fire-breath attack, and then double-jumping over his tiny cranium to repeat the process at the other end. In version 1.03, Sega replaced Godzilla with a giant dinosaur skeleton.

CASTLE OF ILLUSION

SCREW FANTASIA, HERE'S THE REAL DEAL



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE

HISTORY



After ripping into the vomit-inducing *Fantasia* last month, we felt it was only fair to restore peace to the affronted Mickey Mouse videogame community.

Despite arriving early on in the console's life, it's quite astonishing to realise that Mickey's very first Mega Drive outing remains one of the greatest platformers ever to appear on the 16-bit console.

Just look at this screenshot. Back in 1990 this was cutting edge stuff, and even today it manages to hold its own against more recent platformers. Mickey is a masterpiece in sprite design, and while his animation routines now look a little ropey, he's still filled with more charm and character than a dozen Ratchet and Clanks. Indeed, when *Castle Of Illusion* first appeared it was so impressive that you could have sworn you were taking part in an interactive cartoon, such was its beauty.

Outstanding graphics told only half the story, as, with saccharine soundtrack in tow, *Castle Of Illusion* presented you with some of the finest level design around. Granted it wasn't a tough game to complete, but the beautifully crafted stages ensured that you wanted to return to them again and again and again. But then, Sega had crammed so much variety into each and every stage that you just had to revisit them – if only so you could take everything in.

For example, one minute you're being chased down a hill by a huge apple, the next you're leaping into a giant's cup of tea and swimming around in the hot brew, while later stages saw you swinging from light switches, taking massive leaps of faith over immense holes and daintily stepping past cute spiders whilst making your way through the cobweb-infested level that we've shown here.

Crikey, we've run out of space and haven't even had a chance to cover *Castle Of Illusion*'s many bosses. Just take our word for it that they are as challenging as they are inventive. Enough already, just play the damn thing and wash away those *Fantasia* memories forever.



THE MAKING OF

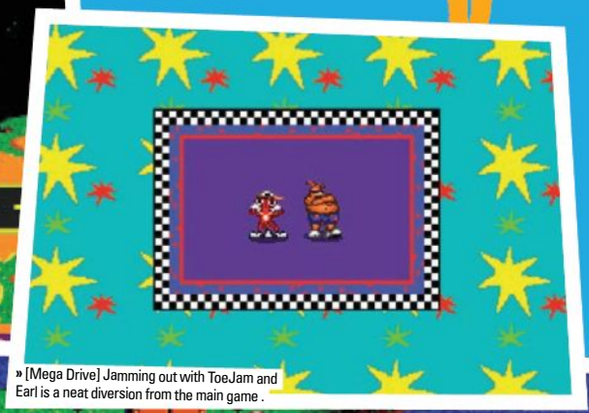
ToeJam & Earl

There are aliens and then there are **ToeJam and Earl**, the hippest cruisers of the galaxy who like nothing better than to rap while cavorting with earthlings. Join him as **Greg Johnson** demonstrates how to strut some funky moves



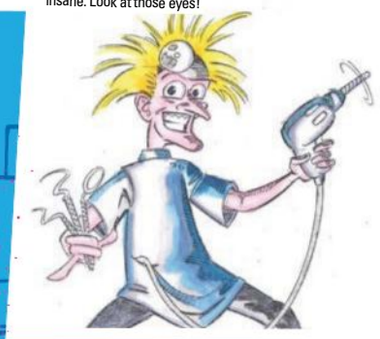


» [Mega Drive] The fanbase has just discovered **Retro Gamer**'s secret hideout.



» [Mega Drive] Jamming out with ToeJam and Earl is a neat diversion from the main game.

» Don't go to this dentist – he's insane. Look at those eyes!





» [Mega Drive] The infamous split-screen mode of which the team is so proud.



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:** JOHNSON VOORSANGER PRODUCTIONS

» **PLATFORM:** SEGA MEGA DRIVE

» **RELEASED:** 1991

» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

We've seen some crazy aliens in our time. Mechanical beings, green-headed men, blobs of goo and even flesh-eating terrifying beasts, which all fall under the alien category, but none quite match the eccentricity of ToeJam and Earl, the red and orange duo with their love of rap and fast food and a laid-back approach to life. The epitome of cool, these aliens know how to dance, enjoy life and rap with the best of them, even if their piloting skills clearly need some improvement. Yet their distinctive names came about purely accidentally.

"I don't think I've mentioned this before, but my old game development partner Mark had a bit of a hearing problem, and when we were first making the game I told him that the names of the characters were FlowJam and Whirl, which seemed like good hip-hop dance names," remembers Greg Johnson. "Mark heard me wrong and coded them as ToeJam and Earl. I only noticed it when we were showing the game to Sega, and they liked the names so we decided to keep them." When it comes down to their bizarre appearance, it really is the stuff that dreams are made of. "When I was little, my favourite stuffy was this little red giraffe named Puffy Muggins," recalls Greg. "Puffy was missing a leg and his mouth had come off. When I thought of the ToeJam character I was having a dream about Puffy Muggins. He was being chased by this giant orange marshmallow creature that wanted to eat him and everything else. It was horrible; I woke up shouting Puffy's name. That's where they both came from."

Greg Johnson and Mark Voorsanger were the duo behind the *ToeJam & Earl* series, with Greg being responsible for the art, design and voices and Mark programming every inch of code. The two had formed their own company in 1989 called Johnson Voorsanger Productions, which was later renamed ToeJam & Earl Productions once the characters became more popular. It was a relationship that proved fruitful, with the duo frequently bouncing ideas off each other. As a result, the two wanted to create a game that they could play together during development.

"I always played Big Earl, and Mark always played ToeJam – he's a little shorter than I am and he wore this crazy medallion. We would high-five when we did something good, or say stuff like, 'Yo, ToeJam,' when we came back together again. Then Mark said, 'Hey, why don't we just put that into the game?' I said, 'No way! I was just thinking the same thing!' I'm still trying to figure out if I was the one being psychic or if it was Mark."

> "IT TOOK FOUR POLICE TO DRAG ME OUT OF THE INTERSECTION WHERE I WAS COMMUNICATING WITH PLANET FUNKOTRON"

The game itself saw ToeJam and Earl crash land on Earth, scattering ship parts across the globe. In order to return home to Planet Funkotron, the alien duo need to locate all ten parts to reassemble their ship. With a gameplay style heavily inspired by *Rogue* – "Actually it was a rip-off. Don't tell anyone." – either character could be controlled across the levels, which are littered with presents to help you on your way. The content of the presents is a mystery but varies from tomatoes for weapons to rocket skates for super speed and even Icarus wings.

When it came to deciding what was included as a power-up, Greg came up with an ingenious method of selection.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TOEJAM & EARL IN PANIC ON FUNKOTRON (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1993

ORLY'S DRAW-A-STORY
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1999

TOEJAM & EARL III: MISSION TO EARTH
SYSTEM: XBOX
YEAR: 2002



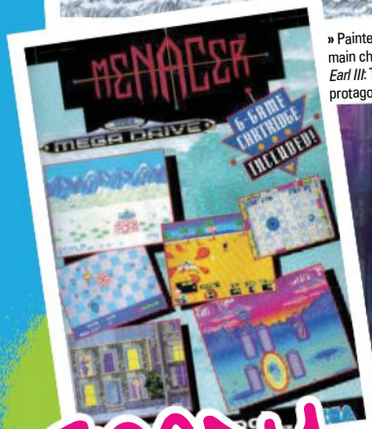
THE MAKING OF







» One of the pencil sketches that Greg made of one of the game's backdrops.





» Painted artwork of the three main characters in *ToeJam & Earl III*: ToeJam, Earl and female protagonist Latisha.

READY, AIM, TOMATOES!

Not content with strutting their stuff on Planet Earth, ToeJam and Earl took time out to feature in a lightgun mini-game created for Sega's new invention: the Menacer. "When Sega released their Menacer gun they asked us if we could whip together a *TJ&E* game in a hurry. We said sure, and put that together in just a month or so using mostly art from game one. It was lots of fun. Mark and me had shooting competitions every day. I still say I would have won if he didn't stand so close to the screen."



> "THE ONLY THING I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GENESIS WAS THAT IT WOULD BREAK EASILY WHEN YOU THREW IT"

"I came up with about 250 ideas for presents, but I could only fit about 30 of them into the game. So I wrote all of my ideas on Post-its and put them on the floor sticky-side up. Then I put my cat down in the room, and slammed the door. I took the first 25 Post-its that stuck to her feet. I use that method quite a lot, actually. It works pretty good, but sometimes it's hard to get her back because she goes under the sofa."

Of course, there are plenty of enemies out to stop you, like crazed shoppers, Cupid, the insane dentist, a phantom ice cream truck and our particular favourite, the Wahini, otherwise known as the hula girls who would force any nearby characters to dance. Leave ToeJam or Earl to their own devices and they will jam out. All music featured in the game was penned by John Baker, who would listen to recordings of Greg Johnson singing into a tape recorder and then re-create the songs in the computer.

With two characters at your disposal, you don't have to embark on the quest alone, which is where the technical marvel of the split-screen two-player mode comes in. Claimed by Sega to be an impossible feat, it was nevertheless implemented by Mark without any technical hiccups. "The Genesis was a great little machine. Everyone at the time said that you couldn't do the split-screen trick, but Mark pulled it off – even though it was his first time programming for the Genesis. The only thing I didn't like so much about the Genesis was that it would break easily when you threw it. Mark got annoyed when I would 'fix' his code every time he went to the bathroom. I got pretty good at ducking out of the way when I'd see the Genesis flying at me. We went through probably eight or nine machines."

While the random map generator received a lot of praise for keeping the game fresh, this was a freak occurrence. "We had spent a lot of time making the maps perfect, and then, when I was demonstrating a Big Earl dance move for Mark, I spilled some soda on his keyboard," confesses Greg. "I don't know exactly how it happened, but it caused a bug that made the maps random. It was really cool. The only bad thing was that sometimes the random generator made the maps into weird shapes. For some reason, when we ran the map generator on Fridays, the maps would come up in the shape of Moses. It was freaky."

Development went from its scheduled year into its second, for which Greg has an interesting explanation: "That's because at one point in the project I thought I'd try not sleeping for about a week. It turns out that that's not such a good idea. I can't remember it so well myself, but Mark tells me that it took four policemen to drag me out of the busy intersection where I was standing, communicating with the aliens of Funkotron. Fortunately I was still able to work from the mental ward."

Despite its delay, when *ToeJam & Earl* was released in 1991 it became something of a sleeper hit, growing in popularity as time progressed. As the game was entirely unique in comparison to the rest of Sega's output, the company



» Another sketch of the game's background visual style featuring the lead characters.

WAITING FOR A STAR TO FALL

Before *ToeJam & Earl* came to be, Greg Johnson's first project was working on a game called *Starflight* for EA on the PC, later ported across to the Mega Drive. As space simulations go, it was an epic quest with a huge world crammed with solar systems comprised of multiple planets that each had a detailed history, and it was all contained on just two floppy disks. Initially starting off as an explorer with limited resources, finding artefacts and ruins makes it possible to travel further afield, encountering other species that have the potential to help or harm. 'What's this got to do with *ToeJam & Earl*?' we hear you cry. It seems that Greg desired to meet some real aliens yet felt it would be quicker to build some of his own. With the birth of *Starflight*, "ToeJam and Earl were the aliens that followed."





was unsure how to market it, which meant that initial sales were quite slow. However, rave reviews raised its profile and word of mouth began to spread, eventually translating into around 250,000 units worldwide – not too shabby for an unknown franchise, and its popularity didn't stop there. "*TJ&E* was on the top ten for rentals for about ten years after its release, and a lot of people played it that way," explains Greg. "We never get any money for rentals, though. Sega was never that into the game for some reason. I think it was a little too weird for them."

With such success under their belt, the two began work on a sequel in the same style as the original, with new surfaces like ice and snow, buildings to enter and more presents to collect. Until, that is, Sega intervened. "Sega never really got the first game so much," recalls Greg sadly. "Their marketing department was like, 'Hmmm, this *ToeJam* game is too weird. Let's just focus on this fast side-scrolling game with the angry blue hedgehog from Japan.' We saw that and said, 'Okay, we're going to do plan B and give you guys a side-scrolling game to sell,' so we bailed on the regular sequel and started *Panic On Funkotron*. Looking back, I think we confused the fans. I know I was confused."

For quite a while all was quiet from our intrepid aliens as they plotted their next conquest. Plans for an N64 release were shelved after a publishing deal fell through, and the Sega Saturn wasn't viewed as popular enough for the third game. So development began on a version for the Sega Dreamcast, which sadly got canned once the console hit financial disaster. *ToeJam & Earl*'s new home would become Microsoft's new flagship console, the Xbox, which had the financial backing to fund the new adventure. Named *ToeJam & Earl III: Mission To Earth* – changed from the more interesting subtitle of '*All Funked Up*' for marketing reasons – the game went on to receive a mixed reception among the press and its fans, many liking the characters' trademark style and humour but not really gelling with the gameplay. Its conflicting choice of style was once again down to publisher pressure.

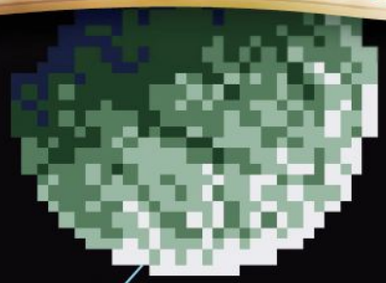
"Well that's pretty much Sega's fault, or more to the point, Visual Concepts. They're the guys who were paying us millions of dollars for the salaries of the people making the game. They said that we needed to change the game to be more like *Donkey Kong*, and they kept wanting us to make it harder. We wanted to make a straight-up remake of *TJ&E*, which is what our fans really wanted. Oh well, you've gotta do what the people with the chequebook say or it's game over," laments Greg. "We did our best to still make it like game one, but it ended up with a lot of extra junk in the game and it was easier to get stuck."

Mission To Earth also introduced Latisha, created so that female gamers would have a character that they could play with rather than being stuck with two guys. "I added her because *TJ&E* is a co-operative game for everybody," says Greg. "I wanted to give the female players a girl character that they could play. I suppose for purists it doesn't seem right – after all, it is *ToeJam & Earl* – but hey, I don't get why people whine about that."

Before Greg embarked on his flight back to Planet Funkotron, we had to ask if there was anything new he had to share with **Retro Gamer** readers. "Yes! If you like the music in *ToeJam & Earl*, go to YouTube and check out *Choo-Choo Soul* – I wrote the music for that too. Also, there is a new movie studio interested in maybe making a feature film based on the characters. If that happens then it's game on, baby. I'd love to make more *ToeJam & Earl* games." Jammin'!

THE CLASSIC GAME

THUNDER FORCE III

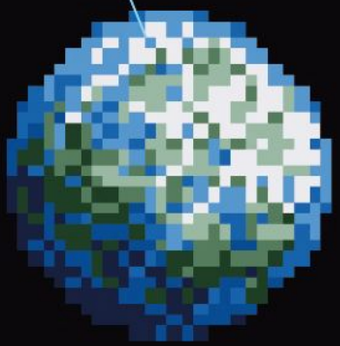


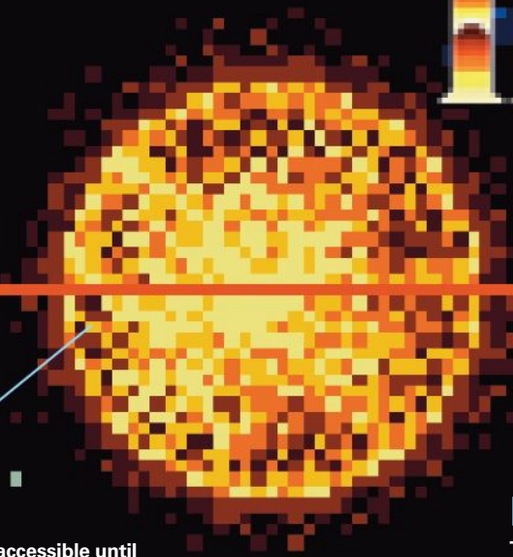
Hydra

This planet acts as an introduction to the game, with fairly weak enemies. It's designed around an ancient forest with heavy gun emplacements, and is guarded by the fire-breathing Gargoyle.

Ellis

The ice world of Ellis scrolls both horizontally and vertically, making it an exceptionally challenging stage. Enemies come thick and fast, and often from behind. It's guarded by the gigantic Mobile Fort.





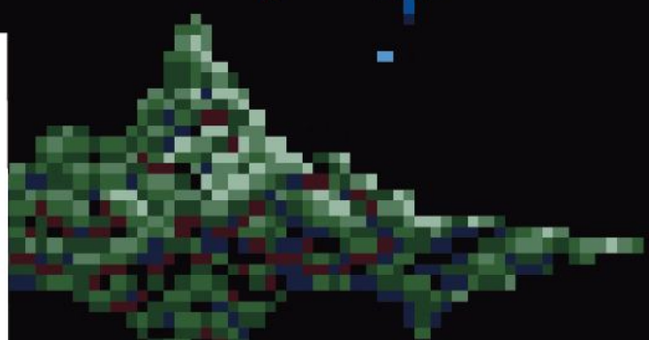
Orn

The final planet isn't accessible until you've completed the others. It's a real ball-ache as well, consisting of three separate areas including a massive mothership called Cerebus and a final boss called ChaOs, found at the planet's core.

Gorgon

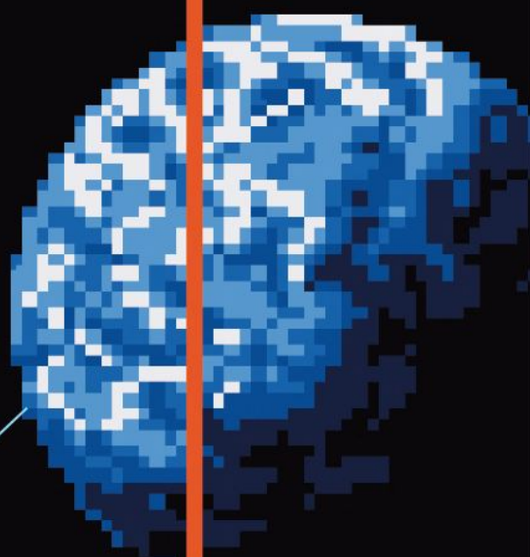
This small planet might look innocent, but it houses a deceptively tough level. Filled with lava and featuring lots of fire-based enemies, it requires a fair amount of skill to negotiate. Mechanical Twin Vulcans guard the exit.

With its stunning visuals, a rocking soundtrack and some gigantic bosses, it's little wonder that Technosoft's *Thunder Force III* is deemed to be one of the best games in the franchise. Usually cowering in the shadow of the equally magnificent *Thunder Force IV*, we've decided to once again penetrate the planet Orn and reveal why this excellent threequel is just as worthy of your time. Darran Jones is in the pilot seat and prepares to take his Fire LEO-03 Styx fighter to hell and back.



Haides

One of the toughest levels in the game. This is due to ever-changing rock formations that can often lead to dead ends. Its guardian is the massive G Lobster, who is much weaker than he actually looks.



Seiren

The world of Seiren is largely aquatic, so you spend all your time underwater. Fortunately, this has no impact on your craft, letting you concentrate on the aquatic enemies and its King Fish boss.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



Perfectly formed

Thunder Force III constantly gets ignored in favour of its epic sequel, but it remains an excellent game in its own right, and an important part of the franchise. It's beautifully paced, for starters, and has a number of interesting gameplay mechanics, challenging enemy waves and some genuinely entertaining bosses. It's also aesthetically amazing, for what is a relatively early Mega Drive release. Meticulous sprite design, a stunning soundtrack and some gorgeously designed levels all combine to create an excellent shooter that really needs to be experienced by anyone with even a casual interest in the genre.



Déjà vu time

The only downside to boss encounters in *Thunder Force III* is that they're a little too easy, even if they retain some excellent designs. While we've a soft spot for the huge G Lobster found on Haides and Gorgon's Twin Vulcan, our favourite boss is actually Cerebus, a massive mothership discovered after defeating the first five planets. In addition to being packed with lasers and cannons, it launches waves of enemy ships at you. You finally defeat it by flying inside it and taking out its core. Yes, it's just a rip-off of *R-Type*'s third stage, but rarely has it been aped as well as it has been here.



Laser-spewing hell

Thunder Force III is packed with plenty of meaty weapons, from the homing power of the Hunter to the useful utility that is the rear shot. By far the most impressive, both in terms of use and aesthetic value, is the Sever laser. Once picked up and selected, it enables your ship to spew out huge bolts of energy that effortlessly slice through most enemies. Many feel that the laser is a little too powerful due to the ease with which you can use it to take down bosses, but due to the relentless assault you're faced with, keeping it until the end of a level is often an achievement in itself.



Stay for the credits

Technosoft is well-regarded for its superb chiptune scores, and it really pushed the boat out with *Thunder Force III*. Many of the compositions are suitably manic and fast-paced, easily re-creating the frenetic action seen on-screen, but the best tune is saved for the ending. After your flight from planet Orn and a truly bonkers plot summary, the triumphant tune shifts to become a melancholic little ditty that's perfectly themed to the scenes of your fighter docking his ship and celebrating with his friends as the credits run. It's a truly fitting, moving ending to an excellent shoot-'em-up.



He's on fire

The stage designs are great throughout, but none compare to the brilliance of Gorgon. It's a cleverly constructed level that's packed with a variety of enemies but also features vicious rock outcrops that need to be avoided at all costs. It also speeds up at certain points, becoming a white-knuckle thrill ride that really takes your breath away. Best of all, though, are the sensational visuals, which show an undulating background representing the intense heat of the planet. It may not look as astonishing as it did in 1990, but it's still impressive enough to make you realise just how talented Technosoft was.



Stick with the original

Thunder Force III proved so popular that Technosoft released it in arcades as *Thunder Force AC* several months after its debut. Haides and Ellis were replaced, the difficulty was upped, and the status bar and autofire option were removed. Its audio is also weaker. This version was ported to the SNES as *Thunder Spirits* and again featured several changes, including a new mothership. Its biggest issue, though, is that it is hampered by slowdown throughout, due to the SNES's slower processor. Our advice is to stick with the original, unless you fancy the stiffer challenge of the arcade version.



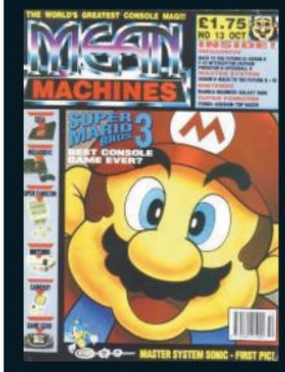
IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **PUBLISHER:** TECHNOSOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines

"There's no denying that the [graphics] remain superb, and the sound is pretty good, but it's playability that counts, and though *Thunder Force* is good, it could have been better."



Allgame.com

"Shooter fans will love the inventive weaponry, variety of creatures, cleverly designed levels and intensity. *Thunder Force III* outdoes *Thunder Force II* and is far superior to [*Thunder Spirits*]."

What we think

You can argue that *Thunder Force IV* cranks everything up to 11, but *III* feels more pure. Yes, it's a little easy, but that just allows you to marvel at its excellent and imaginative enemies. After 22 years, it shows no sign of ageing.

why you must PLAY



Publisher: Sega
Developer: Techno Soft
Released: 1989
Featured Format: Mega Drive

HERZOG ZWEI

HERE AT **RETRO GAMER** WE ARE RELENTLESS IN OUR QUEST TO UNEARTH HIDDEN VIDEOGAMING GEMS FOR YOUR PERUSAL. AS A RESULT, DAMIEN MCFERRAN DUSTS OFF HIS MEGA DRIVE, FIRES UP ONE OF THE MOST UNDERRATED GAMES OF ALL TIME AND CHALLENGES THE PRECONCEPTION THAT THE JAPANESE 'DON'T DO' REAL TIME STRATEGY...

DUKE IT OUT

In the late Eighties, 'strategy' games were predominantly turn-based affairs with grid-like maps. The concept of having two entire armies facing off and carrying out commands in real time was deemed too demanding for gaming machines of the era (and possibly players). *Herzog*, released on the MSX home computer in 1988, changed that perception. Heralded as a 'real time combat simulation' by Techno Soft, *Herzog* was graphically crude and rather basic in execution but it would lay the groundwork for the Mega Drive sequel.



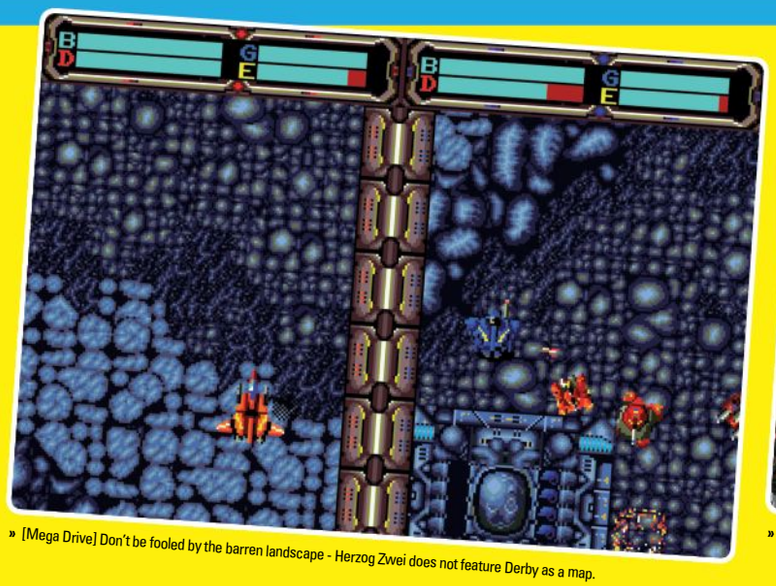
If you asked the average gamer which company they think should be credited with creating the Real Time Strategy (RTS) genre as we know it today, they would most likely respond with 'Westwood Studios', thanks to the tremendous worldwide success of its *Dune* and *Command & Conquer* franchises. However, it would be the wrong answer. The company responsible for laying down the blueprint of the modern RTS is not American, but Japanese – and rather ironically it's better known for its mindless (yet enjoyable) shoot-'em-up releases than its methodical strategy games. Tecno Soft (or Techno Soft as it was known in the West) is a moniker most people will instantly associate with the sublime *Thunder Force* franchise. When *Thunder Force II*, one of its earliest Mega Drive releases, was published in Japan in 1989 alongside an obscure title called *Herzog Zwei* (German for "Duke 2"), it was unsurprising that it received the lion's share of the attention (not to mention sales) and went on to spawn two successful sequels on Sega's 16-bit console. However, it could be argued that *Herzog Zwei* left a more indelible impression – it gave birth to a whole new genre.

The basic premise will be familiar to every RTS fan – two armies clash with the mutual aim of wiping each other off the face of one of the eight different world maps. Unlike

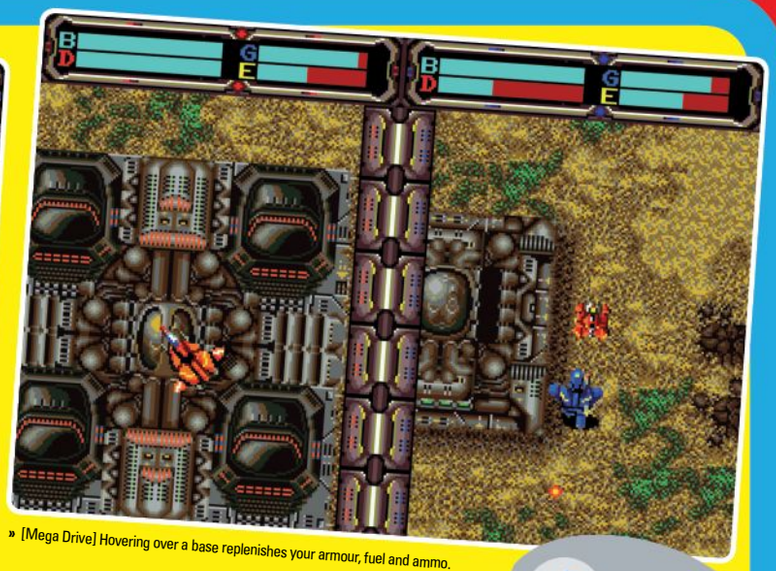




» As always the Japanese boxart (seen on the right) looks far superior to the US effort (far right).



» [Mega Drive] Don't be fooled by the barren landscape - Herzog Zwei does not feature Derby as a map.



» [Mega Drive] Hovering over a base replenishes your armour, fuel and ammo.

most strategy titles, *Herzog Zwei* limits you to exclusive control of just one unit – an incredibly cool mech that can morph into a jet fighter at the touch of a button. There are additional units to construct and these range from foot soldiers to massive tanks and gun emplacements. These units have to be manufactured (which costs both money and time) and issued with instruction programs that determine how they will behave when sent into the field of battle. Assigning instructions is made easier by the use of self-explanatory icons – if you were one of those people who happened to find the Japanese version in your Christmas stocking, this came as a godsend. Although initially it all appears complex (a fact that has no doubt dissuaded many players from persevering with it over the years), it soon becomes second nature. Once you're familiar with the units available and understand which command does what, there really is nothing else to it – however (as is the case with many things in life) *Herzog Zwei* takes a moment to learn but a lifetime to master.

"LIKE MANY THINGS, HERZOG ZWEI TAKES A MOMENT TO LEARN BUT A LIFETIME TO MASTER"

The single-player campaign provides a decent level of challenge and offers ample opportunities to brush up your basic skills and develop tactics, but once a few hours have been invested it becomes too easy to exploit obvious flaws in the CPU intelligence. As with so many games of this type, *Herzog Zwei* only really springs to life in two-player mode – nothing compares to the excitement of competing against a human opponent of equivalent skill. Battles can last for hours as each player assembles their forces, captures bases, loses bases, regroups and starts their offensive anew. To put it bluntly, *Herzog Zwei* is one of the most breathtakingly brilliant multi-player experiences you're ever likely to witness on Sega's 16-bit console and certainly one of the most innovative strategy titles in recent memory.

Unit deployment is simplicity itself – once the unit is constructed and ready, all you have to do is hover your plane over a friendly base and pick it up. Then the piece can be airlifted to any point on the map (so long as you don't run out of fuel – an event which results in you being returned to HQ – you never actually 'die' in the game) and dropped into position. Even in the heat of battle, you have the ability to pick up your forces and relocate them. So although 'complete' control of each unit is never granted (as was the case in Westwood's games), you're still able to redistribute your forces and plan new tactics 'on the fly'. A special mention must be made regarding your avatar on the field of battle – the transforming robot/jet plane. Serving as both mouse pointer and an offensive weapon in its own right, the use of the mech is one of the main factors that sets *Herzog Zwei* apart from subsequent RTS titles. It allows the player to participate

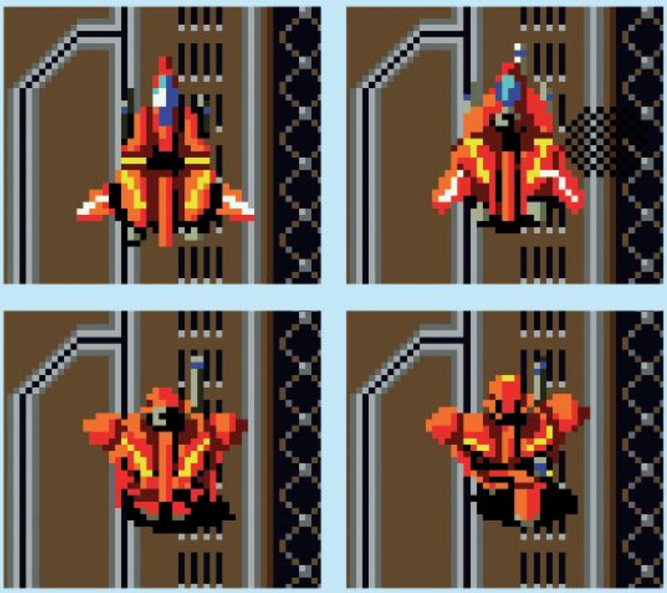
REMEMBER WHEN?

Nothing beats the feeling of victory and in *Herzog Zwei* winning against a human opponent is very sweet indeed. You never forget your first triumph over a fellow carbon-based life form…



MAGICAL MOMENT

If you're a child of the Eighties then you'll probably have an affinity to Hasbro's *Transformers* franchise. Therefore, the appeal of controlling a giant robot will need no explanation. The first time you play *Herzog Zwei*, you will spend the first ten minutes pressing 'A' in order to witness the transformation sequence and hear the sound effect that accompanies it.



why you must PLAY



» [Mega Drive] That yellow marker shows an incoming missle - lummie!



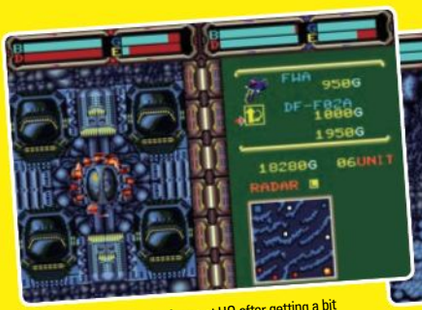
» [Mega Drive] The 'SOS' sign indicates your HQ is under enemy fire - cripes!

MAPS

There are eight different stages in *Herzog Zwei*. Each one has different characteristics, which will affect your battle tactics accordingly.



"SUCCESS IN HERZOG ZWEI DEPENDS ON CONTROLLING THE VARIOUS NEUTRAL BASES SCATTERED ACROSS THE MAP"



» [Mega Drive] Red reforms at HQ after getting a bit of a beating. No doubt it will be more careful next time…



» [Mega Drive] Sadly, 'Go Faster Stripes' are not an optional extra when building armoured cars.

in the melee rather than just sit passively as friendly units find themselves on the wrong end of a beating. If the tide of battle turns against your forces, there's the option to fly into the thick of things and vaporize a few of those hostiles personally.

Although ultimate victory is gained via the destruction of your rival's headquarters, success in *Herzog Zwei* depends largely on controlling the various neutral bases that are scattered across the map. Foot soldiers, when given a specific 'occupy' order, will proceed to the nearest neutral or enemy base and enter it. Once four units have been sent in, it falls under your control. Not only does this grant additional funds with which to construct forces (money is drip-fed into your war chest every few seconds – the more bases you own, the amount of cash you receive in each 'top-up' increases), it also means that the base can serve as an outpost where you can collect newly built units, restock your fuel and ammo and use as a rally point to launch attacks on the opposing HQ. Because all units in the game only have a finite amount of fuel and ammo (including your mech), control of these bases is vital. In order to stage an effective offensive it is important that a foothold is established close enough to permit a sustained assault. Even when a base is occupied, it doesn't mean it will remain that way – your rival can send in their units to reduce the tally and eventually occupy it.



» [Mega Drive] The handy 'ok' handsign means a unit is constructed and ready for pickup.



» [Mega Drive] The Red Commander attempts to stop the Blue army from occupying a neutral base.

THE UNITS

INFANTRY (FOOT SOLDIER)
These are the basic grunts. They have weak firepower and poor armour, but are vital to your army as they are the only unit that can occupy bases.



FWA (MOTORCYCLE SCOUT)
Has much the same firepower as a foot soldier, but these guys are seriously nippy. Handy for drawing out enemy forces.



ARM-51D (ARMOURED CAR)
This is rendered largely pointless by the Tank, though these units are still handy if you need to keep enemy soldiers at bay.



TAX-52 (TANK)
Strong armour and excellent firepower at the expense of speed, but you'll be relying on these guys to perform most of your offensive manoeuvres.



SAM-42 (SURFACE-TO-AIR UNIT)
These are designed specifically to attack the enemy commander's plane. The missiles lock-on and a few hits are lethal.



GMR-34A (GUN EMPLACEMENT)
The most powerful unit in the game, but there's a catch – it can't move. Also features anti-air capabilities.



ST-57U (BOAT)
These possess a decent degree of firepower, but can only be used on levels where there's water, which is obvious, as it's a boat.



SUPPLY (SUPPLY TRUCK)
These units have absolutely no offensive capability whatsoever; their purpose is exclusively to refuel and re-arm units in the field.



THE PROGRAMS

BDF-1SD (OVERWATCH)

Unit does not move, and attacks only when an enemy comes within range.

AF-001A (PATROL)

Unit will move in a patrol circle and attack any enemy forces that it encounters.

AT-101 (APPROACH BASE)

Unit will head towards the nearest neutral/enemy base and wait there until it is occupied.

AT-101H (OCCUPY)

This means a unit will enter the nearest neutral/enemy base. (Infantry only).

DF-F02A (PURSUE AND ENGAGE)

Unit will remain stationary until an enemy unit approaches, it will then pursue until it either destroys it or the enemy escapes.

BA-001C (ATTACK HQ)

Unit will set off to attack the enemy HQ – this is probably the most important command in the game – without it, you can't win.

PW-SS10 (SUPPLY)

This command is only available to the supply truck. The truck will provide aid to any units that need fuel or ammo.

Because the game is unashamedly unconventional and difficult to pigeon-hole (being neither a shooter or an out-and-out turn based strategy title), it sold poorly when it was released and was quickly forgotten in favour of games which offered more immediate gratification (ironically, games like the aforementioned Tecno Soft stable mate *Thunder Force II*). American magazine Electronic Gaming Monthly gave it one of the lowest ratings for a Mega Drive/Genesis title (at the time) – a clear indication that the contemporary press were just as baffled as the general public (although it must be mentioned that EGM recently reassessed their stance and named it as one of their all-time favourite games). Tecno Soft's pedigree worked against it too – as *Herzog Zwei* featured shooter-elements, people judged it as such and they obviously came away sorely disappointed. It could be argued that the game only saw the light of day in the West because it was completely free of Japanese text and was released early in the Mega Drive's life – traditionally this is when most unusual Japanese games have the best chance of being localized due to the limited amount of software available.

Commercial failure aside it's startling that no developer, not even Tecno Soft itself (now sadly departed), has ever tried to improve on what is a near-flawless gaming concept. It's possible to pick up a second-hand Mega Drive and a copy of the game for a reasonable amount, so there really is no excuse not to experience this fantastic piece of software. *Herzog Zwei* is one of the most essential multi-player titles ever released, and quite simply deserves to be played.



» [Mega Drive] The two commanders clash over some hot lava, the loser will really feel the heat. Ouch!



» [Mega Drive] You can construct units and check the map using the status screen.



» [Mega Drive] Pausing the game presents you with a map and plenty of useful information.

IMPORT ONLY



INFO

» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** GAME FREAK
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE
» **ALSO ON:** VIRTUAL CONSOLE
» **GENRE:** PLATFORM
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20+ ($40+)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro



SONIC 2
RELEASED: **1992**
The best platformer on the Mega Drive and you can pick it up for pennies. Sonic's second 16-bit outing was a defining moment for the Blue Blur, adding a popular sidekick, a neat dash move and Super Sonic to the canon.

▼ Modern



RAYMAN LEGENDS
RELEASED: **2013**
We were expecting Mario to reinvent the platformer after all this time, but the task has fallen to Michel Ancel and his talented team at Ubisoft Montpellier. *Rayman Legends* builds upon the fun of 2011's *Rayman Origins* and adds all sorts of inventive new tricks. The end result is a stunning platformer that all fans of the genre will adore.

PULSEMAN

» From the fertile minds that brought us Pokémon came Pulseman: not only one of the best Mega Drive titles to never leave Japan, but also one of the most electrifying platform heroes to appear on the console. That's the only electricity pun in this entire feature, honest

It's likely that you've never heard of *Pulseman*. The game was released relatively late in the Mega Drive's life, and was only released officially in Japan despite the 16-bit era marking a bit of a renaissance period for the platform genre. It's a shame, too, as this lavish-looking offering by Game Freak – the team that would go on to create *Pokémon* – and, most notably, *Pokémon* designer Ken Sugimori, was one of the better platform games to come out of that epoch, in our opinion, and is widely regarded as a masterpiece in game design.

A mixture of *Sonic* and *Mega Man*, but with a strong pang of *Rocket Knight Adventures*, *Pulseman* was a glorious-looking platform game that may have felt like a mixture of other platform games you've played before, but it brought these pilfered ingredients to the boil with an impressive amount of care and attention, making it a bit of an undiscovered classic for the Mega Drive.

In the game you play as a Pulseman: a half-robot half-human boy who is the result of his scientist dad creating artificial life and then copping off with one of his creations. It's a weird back story, and one that, for legal reasons, we have to leave right there, but from this odd union of man and machine, Earth gets itself a new platform game hero who can harness electricity – a power that Game Freak would later give to Pikachu – and travel freely between the electronic and real world. However, when prolonged exposure to the digital world changes Pulesman's dad into a crazed scientist, and he embarks on a bit of global cyber-terrorism, it falls to Pulseman to put an end to the evildoer's… uh… evildoing.

» [Mega Drive] This level shows off some of the subtle techniques that Game Freak uses to make levels feel more impressive.



Split across six sizeable stages, glued together by a variety of bonus levels, plus a final one to draw things to a nice close, *Pulseman* certainly holds a lot of longevity. And the fact that you're given a bit of freedom in what way you can attack the game means that even if you're



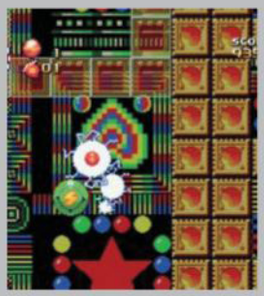
» [Mega Drive] As well as being wonderfully animated, Pulseman has a dizzying array of moves.



» [Mega Drive] *Pulseman* clearly borrows elements from other games, most notably *Mega Man*.



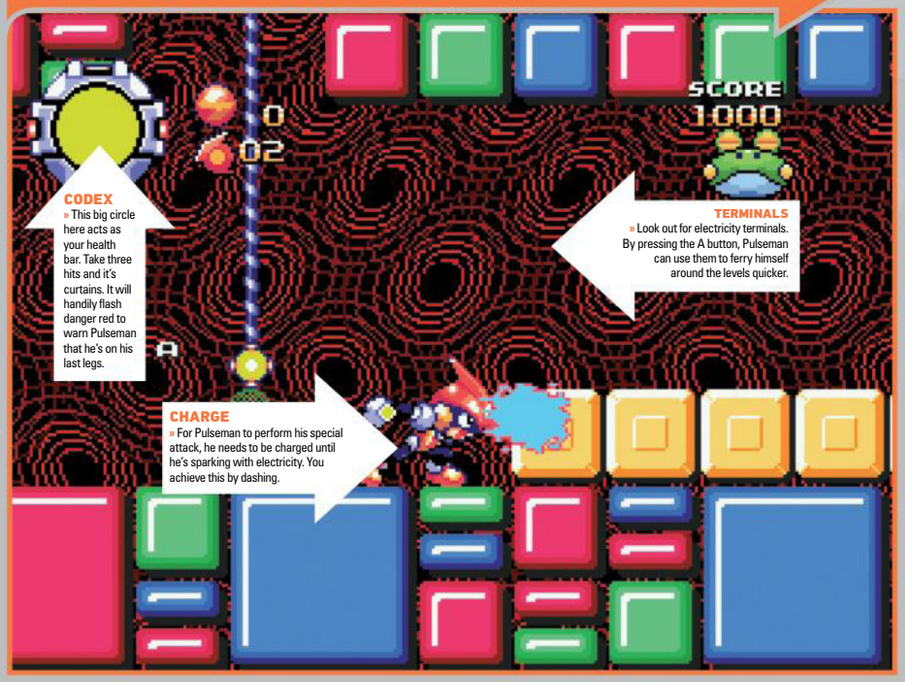
» [Mega Drive] Pulseman was the creation of *Pokémon* designer Ken Sugimori.



» [Mega Drive] The levels are the stars of *Pulseman*, with each feeling unique.

GO DEEPER

What to look for when playing Pulseman

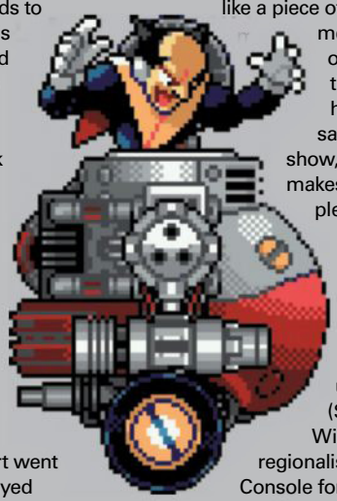


"Many who have actually played the game cite it as one of the best-looking Mega Drive games to ever find a release"

rubbish at it, you can still get to see a lot of the good stuff that *Pulseman* has to offer – another *Mega Man* parallel.

The levels in *Pulseman* are large and well-detailed, but oddly sparse and usually only containing a handful of enemies to circumvent. The challenge tends to come from helping Pulseman negotiate his way around the game's brilliantly designed worlds using his various powers. And this is another great element of the game. Pulseman boasts an impressive arsenal of moves, which includes a neat jump kick that destroys those annoying enemies lurking on overhead ledges – why can't all platform game heroes have a handy move like this? There's also a close-range electric slash attack, and a dash move that generates enough friction to allow him to morph into a concentrated ball of electricity and pinball around the screen a bit like Sparkster.

Also featuring sublime music courtesy of *Pokémon* composer Junichi Masuda, it's clear that a great deal of effort went into the game. In fact, many who have played *Pulseman* cite it as one of the best-looking Mega Drive games to find a release, and while we agree that the game certainly is a looker, if we had one criticism, it's that many of the enemy designs do feel a little bland and uninspired: a metal mouse, something that looks like a piece of moving metal grass, and a giant metal balloon of a cat's face firing oranges are just a few examples of the throwaway adversaries that Pulseman has to face in the game. But as we've said, the levels are the true stars of the show, as all have some quirky element that makes them both a joy to discover and a pleasure to negotiate.



Sadly *Pulseman* never found an official release outside Japan – it was available for a period on Sega's on-demand Genesis games service Sega Channel in the US, however – and, owing to its scarcity, copies usually fetch in the region of £20-40 ($30-$60) on eBay. If you own a Wii, though, you can now pick up a regionalised version of the game on Virtual Console for 900 Points (around £6/$10).



ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES

» Developed by Nobuya Nakazato of Konami, the man behind some of the best games in the *Contra* series, *Rocket Knight Adventures* was a neat mix of cutesy platformer and run-and-gunner interspersed with neat side-scrolling shooter sections.

THE MAKING OF

THE IMMORTAL



We've always considered it a delicious irony that the main character in *The Immortal* meets a sticky end in a variety of particularly gruesome ways. Damien McFerran caught up with creator Will Harvey and thanks to the Dust of Compliance, convinced him to spill the beans on this underrated action adventure

Ever done something on the spur of the moment and found yourself in a tight squeeze as a result? Will Harvey certainly has. Back in his high school days he studied computer programming and when the teacher enquired if anyone in the class knew about Assembly language, Harvey keenly thrust his hand skywards despite the exact opposite being true. The youngster was perturbed to discover that this moment of irrational impulsiveness had resulted in him receiving the dubious honour of putting together a class presentation about the aforementioned programming language the following day. "I learned a lot about Assembly that night, I can tell you." chuckles Harvey today, older and thankfully much wiser. However, this one, fleeting moment of barefaced dishonesty had fateful repercussions and ultimately set him on the road to videogame stardom.

Having unwittingly exposed himself to the questionable joys of Assembly programming, Harvey discovered that

» [Mega Drive] One wrong step and you're worm food. Oof!

"SEGA WERE FINE WITH THE DEATH ANIMATIONS, BUT NINTENDO WEREN'T. THEY MADE US GET RID OF THE BLOOD" WILL HARVEY

he had become curiously hooked and therefore continued to expand his knowledge long after the infamous class presentation had been and gone. "At 15 I wrote a game called *Lancaster* for the Apple II" he vividly recalls. This rather basic *Space Invaders* clone was completed in 1982, and it was the need for musical accompaniment that led effortlessly onto Harvey's next project: "I required music for *Lancaster*, so in 1984 I wrote *Music Construction Set*." This proved to be his breakthrough release – a glorious mixture of entertainment and education, which allowed users to learn the basics of musical notation. Astonishingly, Harvey was a tender 15 years of age when he began work on this sizable hit. Electronic Arts subsequently picked it up for publication and quickly ported the game to other popular platforms of the era. In keeping with its early promotional campaigns (which focused heavily on the normally camera-shy guys responsible for the incredible games they were publishing) EA decided to showcase the fresh-faced Harvey as a 'star programmer'. The shy youth soon discovered that he was becoming something of a video-gaming icon.

Despite his newfound fame, Harvey refused to rest on his laurels and proceeded to gain numerous qualifications at Stanford University (including a PhD in Computer Science) while simultaneously furthering his programming career. He founded his own company – Sandcastle Entertainment – and released *Zany Golf* in 1988 for the Apple IIGS. Once again, heaps of critical acclaim followed and Electronic Arts eventually ported the light-hearted isometric golf sim to several formats, including the fledgling Sega Mega Drive/Genesis in 1990. It was around this time that Harvey began to brainstorm the concept of a fantasy role-playing title, but with a twist that would have been tremendously unique for the time. "I wanted to make an online graphical adventure," he remembers. This was a tall order and a bold move, when you consider the fact that the internet was still very much in its infancy back in the early-Nineties, nevertheless Will Harvey persevered with his grandiose plan.

Assembling a crack team of artists and programmers – which included Brett G. Durrett, Michael Marcantel and Ian Gooding, Harvey set about crafting what would eventually evolve into a wholly unprecedented fantasy epic. The project was initially christened 'Campaign', which gives an indication of where Harvey was headed with his original vision. "Initially it was playable with others over a modem, which was very cool." The idea involved each player selecting a different fantasy role (Elf, Warrior, Wizard and so on) and setting off into the uncharted wilderness of the World Wide Web for fame and fortune. The name was later changed to *The Immortal* and Harvey discovered that as he and his team tinkered with the project, it began to shake off its



» [Mega Drive] Although they initially appear to be hostile, later on the goblins come to your aid.



» [Mega Drive] When was the last time you saw a hole covered in creepy spider webs and thought, "I think I'll venture inside"?

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** SANDCASTLE

» **RELEASED:** 1990 (APPLE IIGS)

» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ZANY GOLF
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1988

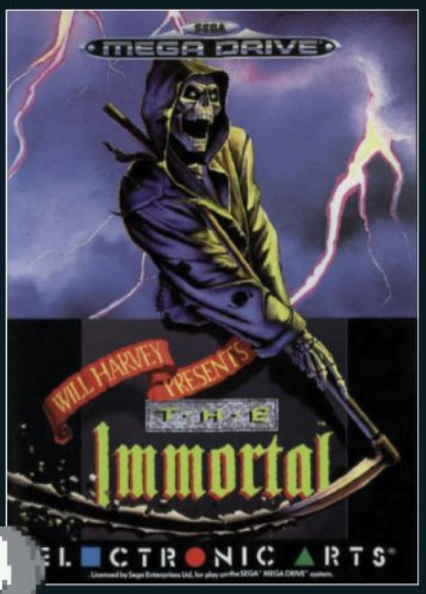
MUSIC CONSTRUCTION SET
SYSTEM: APPLE II
YEAR: 1984



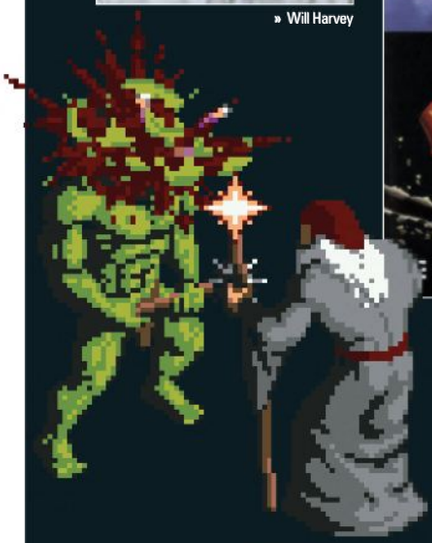
THE MAKING OF

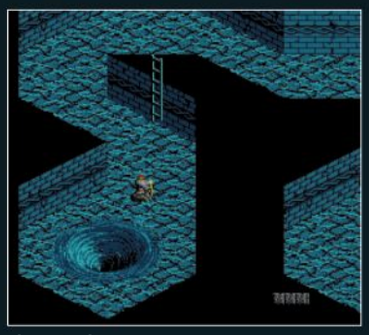


» Will Harvey



» The Mega Drive version featured some lush artwork, which no doubt helped shift a few copies.





» [Mega Drive] The barrel was great. Just avoid whirlpools.

online aspirations. "Over time the focus became the storyline instead of the online plan," he comments. Eventually the team realised that if they were to incorporate an arresting plot, the online multiplayer would have to be sacrificed entirely. The focus was duly altered and as a result *The Immortal* became a resolutely single-player adventure.

Harvey didn't want his new game to blend into the crowd and nurtured definite ideas regarding the kind of experience he wanted to create. Rather than follow the clichéd route of pitting good against evil in a fantasy environment, the team decided to force players to think carefully about what course of action they took. "We had a theme to the storyline," explains Harvey. "That is to say, the story had a point, or a moral. The moral was: 'Think before you act; be aware of the consequences of your actions'. This moral is supported by the plot." As the player descended ever further into the labyrinth this became more and more apparent and several moral judgements had to be made in order to progress – the actions of which had a telling impact on the eventual outcome of the adventure. "For example, if you indiscriminately kill goblins, then you will miss the opportunity to make allies of them later in the quest" explains Harvey. "You can still finish the game but you get a different ending at best." Few games of this type ever attempted to portray tangible consequences to the player's actions in the same way *The Immortal* did.

Possibly the most memorable aspect of *The Immortal* was the innovative combat engine. At certain points the player was able to engage enemies in one-on-one combat. In the console and PC versions the viewpoint would quickly switch to a close up of the two combatants, and by combining button presses with the direction pad the player was able to swing a particularly sharp sword at their quarry. Evasive manoeuvres were also possible, allowing for an effortless shift between offensive and defensive postures. This called for a refined sense of timing, as it was imperative that the sword swipes and dodges were executed correctly. It hardly ranks as the most awe-inspiring fighting engine ever crafted but remains a definite improvement on the usual turn-based variety seen in fantasy adventures of the era.

The incredible enemy death animations were the icing on the cake and unsurprisingly they caused the design team a few headaches when it came to porting the game to the 'kiddie friendly' home console market: "Sega

DEATH ANIMATIONS

While many games of the 16-bit era featured large doses of death and destruction, few came close to attaining the same level of detail as *The Immortal*. Pre-dating *Mortal Kombat's* fatalities by a couple of years, defeating each enemy rewarded the player with a grisly, ultra-violent 'finishing move'. Some of these were fairly straightforward – a quick sword swipe removing the head from the torso, for example – but others were slightly more extravagant. The player was confronted with exploding craniums, flaming incineration and spontaneous combustion in this most gruesome of fantasy games. Considering the frail appearance of the game's main character, these inventive forms of execution were made all the more shocking. It's little wonder that Nintendo refused to allow Harvey's team to incorporate them into the NES conversion – which leaves the warts-and-all Mega Drive port as the definitive console version to track down and enjoy.



"IT'S KIND OF HARD TO HAVE A WIZARD'S HEAD BLOW UP WITHOUT BLOOD" WILL HARVEY

The game made its debut on the Apple IIGS in 1990 (it turned out to be one of EA's last major releases for the system) but when it became obvious that Harvey and his team at Sandcastle had crafted a truly unique role-playing experience, *The Immortal* was ported to the Amiga, Atari ST, IBM PC, Mega Drive and even the lowly 8-bit Nintendo Entertainment System (NES).

It's very easy to pigeonhole Harvey's game as 'just another role-playing adventure', but in reality it's actually more of a curiously compulsive mixture of real-time action and 'point-and-click' exploration. Viewed from an isometric viewpoint, the action takes place in the dank subterranean ruins beneath the ancient city of Erinoch. The player assumes the role of an apprentice wizard desperately searching for his master Mordamir, who has absent-mindedly got himself lost within the ominously titled 'Labyrinth of Eternity'. Along the way there are numerous encounters with shady denizens of the deep, including goblins, trolls, giant worms, spiders and finally a massive, fire-breathing dragon.



» [NES] Sanitised, gore-free combat ensues in the NES conversion.



» [Mega Drive] Our wizard chum appears to be offering this dragon a sore throat lozenge – what a thoughtful chap.



» [Mega Drive] Mystical-malarkey abounds as the wizard takes flight on his lucky, lucky carpet.



» [NES] The actually-quite-good NES version in all its glory.



» [Mega Drive] Going behind that door is asking for trouble.

were fine with the death animations, but Nintendo weren't," remembers Harvey. "They made us get rid of the blood in the NES version." This was standard procedure as far as Nintendo was concerned (who could possibly forget the infamous SNES version of *Mortal Kombat*, which lacked the biggest selling point of the game – gore?). Harvey and his team – so used to having total freedom when coding for the Apple IIGS – could do nothing but comply with the request. "It's kind of hard to have a wizard's head blow up without blood, but we did what we could" he says with a wry smile. Regardless of this, Harvey is proud of what his team achieved with the limited power of Nintendo's aging 8-bit machine. "The graphics on the NES were unprecedented at the time," he says with a sense of pride. Indeed, when placed alongside the 16-bit versions, the Nintendo port doesn't look as shoddy as you might expect.

One characteristic of *The Immortal* that went down slightly less well with many sectors of the gaming public was the preference for unpredictable and wholly unexpected deaths. At many points within the game the player would be killed simply for stepping on the wrong spot or speaking to a character without having a certain item in their inventory. Playing without a guidebook quickly changed the game into an almost tiresome process of trial and error. It was essential to find out what mistakes to avoid by dying a few times, then completing the level with this vital knowledge in hand. One infamous section involved inspecting a seemingly harmless skeleton for valuable items. Replying positively when asked to inspect 'something wet' underneath the bones resulted in the player being instantly dissolved by deadly slime. To some this kind of structure proved to be an almost insurmountable obstacle to enjoyment, but to others it harked back to the unforgiving graphical adventures of old and gave the game an edgy, unpredictable quality. At times the level of tension was almost unbearable and it made players more wary of wandering into situations that might prove to be fatal. Besides, the elaborate player death animations often went some way to softening the disappointment of an unexpected demise.

Although *The Immortal* garnered worldwide success and healthy sales, it wasn't enough to gain a sequel. Sandcastle Entertainment began to dabble in online gaming technology, creating tools that permitted smooth, lag-free gaming between online players. The company was eventually purchased by Adobe in 1997 and the following year Harvey founded 'There Inc' from a room in his parents' house, working alongside artist Jeffrey Ventrella to create the immersive and open-ended virtual 3D world 'There'.

Although it was originally designed with communication and social interaction in mind, Harvey found that the company's investors didn't share his utopian vision and in 2004 the decision was made to ditch the consumer side of the business and develop exclusively for (more profitable) military and government applications of the technology. Harvey had left by this point and was already working on a tantalising new project called 'IMVU' (www.imvu.com) – the next generation of instant messaging. Using fully customisable 3D avatars, people from all over the world are now able to create themselves in an online world and converse with friends as if they were in the same space. According to Harvey, the service has over 7 million users and is growing faster than more traditional social networking sites like MySpace. With yet another success under his belt, time will tell if Harvey decides to step back into the video-gaming arena and produce another unique experience for fans of *The Immortal* to savour.



» [Mega Drive] "Which way now?"



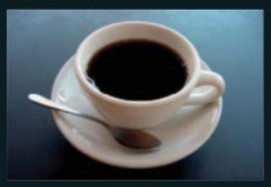
» [Mega Drive] Wasn't this in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*…



» [Mega Drive] "Now it's your turn."

MAKE MINE A DECAF

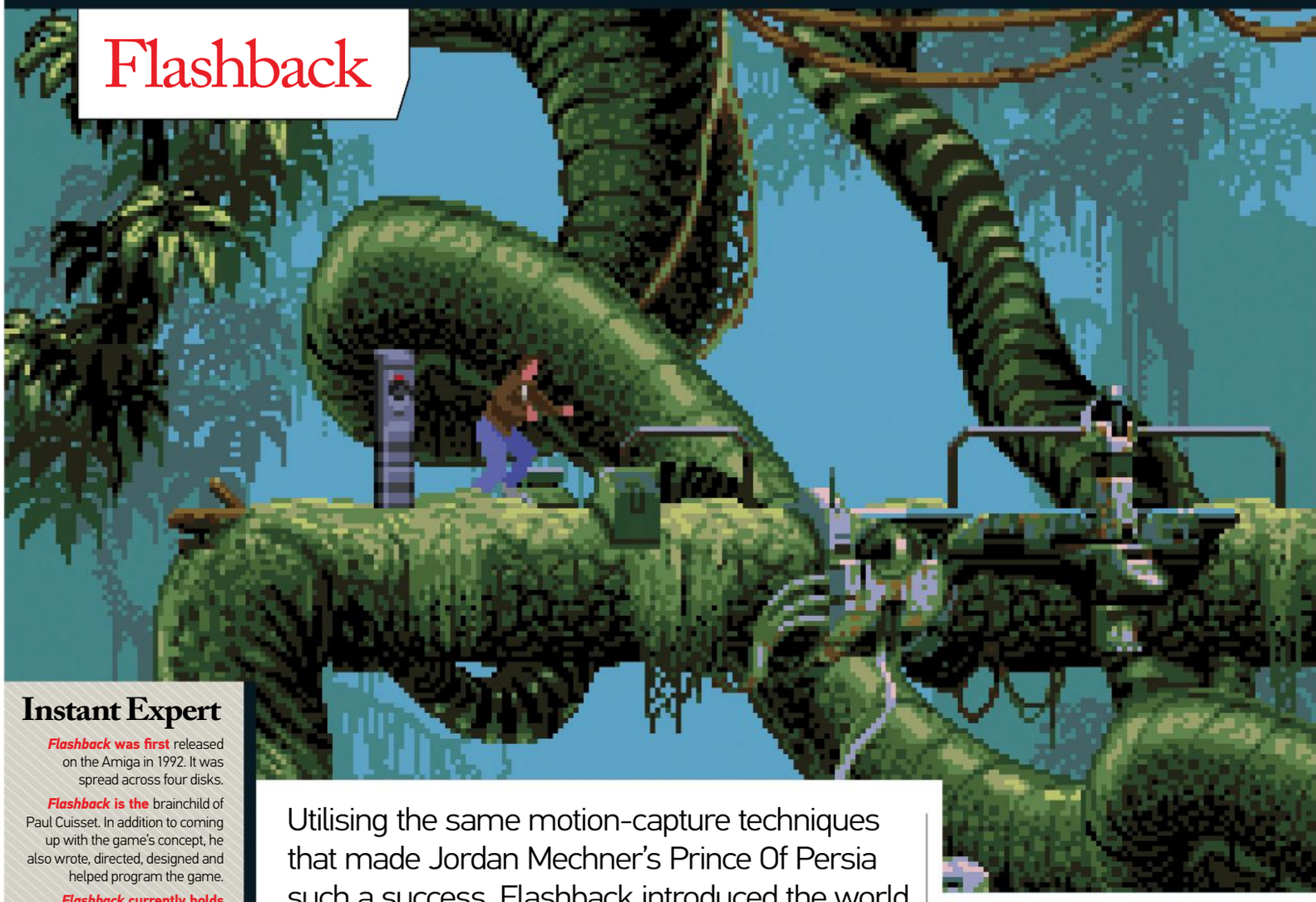
Harvey was extremely fond of inserting secret 'Easter eggs' into many of his games – *Zany Golf* famously featured a secret hole that was almost impossible to access, and Harvey's conversion of Mark Cerny's arcade classic *Marble Madness* shipped with an additional level that even Cerny himself was unaware of. *The Immortal* was no exception and contained a highly unusual hidden section. "The secret level in the Apple version has an almost infinite corridor with the design team of the game hidden at the end," reveals Harvey. "On Level five you had to make it through the trap door room and fall into the last hole without using your trap door sensor, then walk for 15 minutes in the corridor. You also needed the 'coffee maker' object which is found earlier in the game for when you meet one of the team, otherwise he kills you." Who says game designers are highly strung?





THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

Flashback



Instant Expert

***Flashback* was first** released on the Amiga in 1992. It was spread across four disks.

***Flashback* is the** brainchild of Paul Cuisset. In addition to coming up with the game's concept, he also wrote, directed, designed and helped program the game.

***Flashback* currently holds** the Guinness World Record for being the bestselling French game of all time.

Due to its popularity, *Flashback* received a sequel that was released in 1996. *Fade To Black* was only available on the PC and PSone, and was vastly different to its predecessor.

***Flashback* was also** due for release on Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Developed by Adeline Software, the port featured a brand new plot and many new locations. A leaked beta ROM is available online.

The PC DOS version has an extended cut-scene sequence that wasn't in other versions of the game.

US Gold released *Flashback* in Europe and North America. In Japan, publishing duties fell to Sunsoft.

US versions of the Mega Drive, Mega-CD and Super Nintendo games came with a Marvel comic that explained much of Conrad's back story.

Utilising the same motion-capture techniques that made Jordan Mechner's Prince Of Persia such a success, Flashback introduced the world to Conrad B Heart and another delicious slice of French gaming. Darran Jones takes the Mega Drive outing for a spin...

Many people think that *Flashback* is the sequel to *Another World*. It isn't, but we can certainly see why these comparisons are made. Both games use cut-scenes to advance their stories, both take place on strange alien worlds, they were both published by Delphine, and both benefit from truly glorious rotoscoped animation.

The similarities end there, though, and while *Flashback* certainly feels familiar if you've ever played Eric Chahi's game, it's a totally different and far more ambitious beast.

Indeed, what impresses you about *Flashback* is the sheer amount of variety and scale that it offers you. One minute you're platforming through a gorgeous-looking jungle, the next you're negotiating the new-age subways of Titan, taking part in a game show akin to *The Running Man* and exploring an alien planet. It's a huge, impressive monster of a game that was so grand in scope that at one stage it was pitched as a "CD-ROM game on a cartridge".

First released on the Amiga in 1992, it immediately won rave reviews due to its cinematic cut-scenes, breathtaking animation and varied gameplay. It was quickly ported to all manner of computers and home consoles, ranging from Sega's Mega Drive to the FM Towns and Atari's Jaguar, and it remains highly regarded by anyone who's been fortunate enough to play it.

Flashback tells the story of Conrad B Heart, an agent who has to recover his lost memory when he discovers that aliens are living in his world and disguising themselves as government officials, plotting to destroy Earth. After being captured in *Flashback*'s epic opening and subsequently escaping, Conrad must recover his precious memories – don't worry; he kept them conveniently safe – and save the world.

It's showtime!

Yes, it takes elements from numerous movies of the time – most notably the aforementioned *The Running Man* and the excellent *They Live* – but Conrad's tale still feels refreshingly different, effortlessly building on the story structure that Jordan Mechner carefully created for his *Prince Of Persia*. It also feels suitably epic, with most levels beginning with larger-than-life cut-scenes that forward Conrad's plight and keep the player absolutely enthralled with what's happening on screen. Again, it's not a new mechanic for videogames and had been utilised to similar great effect in 1991's *Another World*, and yet somehow

Pixel Perfect

Get a load of Flashback's wonderful rotoscoped animation



Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...



"It's challenging, entertaining, thoroughly addictive, and it looks better than any random sequence from Cindy Crawford's workout video."

- **AMIGA POWER** ISSUE 25

Twin Galaxies High Scores

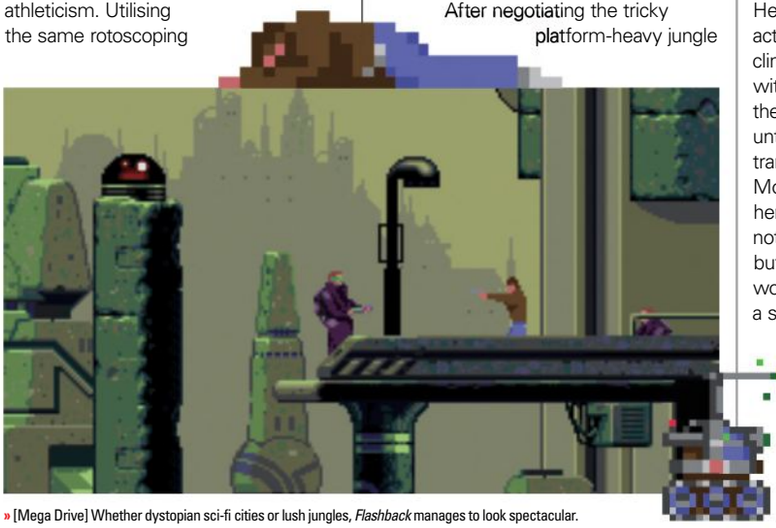
Interestingly, there are no current high scores for *Flashback* on Twin Galaxies. Categories exist for both time trials (NTSC and PAL versions) and overall high scores, so let's see if a reader can set a new record for one of them.

Flashback just felt more filmic, possibly due to it riffing so heavily on those previously mentioned movies.

Even with its cinematic cut-scenes, it's *Flashback*'s riveting gameplay and sheer variety that last longest in the memory and will keep you playing through to its impressive end. Waking up in one of Titan's jungles, the first stage of *Flashback* is little more than an excuse to test your abilities and get used to Conrad's amazing athleticism. Utilising the same rotoscoping techniques that worked so well in *Prince Of Persia* – clearly a major inspiration given the number of similarities – and *Another World*, Conrad B Heart is an absolute joy to watch in motion, effortlessly climbing and leaping around the large game world. There are certainly moments that feel occasionally clunky – drawing your gun, for example, or making certain jumps – but even their limitations rarely ruin Conrad's breathtaking animation.

After negotiating the tricky platform-heavy jungle the gameplay becomes a little more sedate, with Conrad travelling to New Washington and having to earn a work permit – six years before Ryo started working on the docks in *Shenmue* – in order to earn entry to the charmingly named *Death Tower*, a *Running Man*-styled show – there's that comparison again – that allows the survivor to win a free pass to Earth. Here the gameplay becomes more action-oriented, with Conrad having to climb several levels that are swarming with enemies. Upon reaching Earth the exploration opens up yet again, until Conrad eventually finds himself transported to the alien planet of the Morphs. Several moments of extreme heroism later and the game ends with not only a nod to Ridley Scott's *Alien*, but also the prospect that all your hard work has been for nothing. Fortunately, a sequel eventually appeared in the form of *Fade To Black*.

It's frustratingly hard in places, with the controls not always feeling like they're keeping up with Conrad, but the end result is a timeless platform adventure that, like the best of wines, just keeps getting better with age.



» [Mega Drive] Whether dystopian sci-fi cities or lush jungles, *Flashback* manages to look spectacular.

The Devices

Conrad finds devices throughout his adventure that offer new abilities to turn against his pursuers



» Holocube

This essential device is picked up at the beginning of your adventure and explains where you need to go to properly continue your quest.



» Credits

You won't get far on Titan without money. Credits can be earned by getting a job permit or by simply picking them up from the ground.



» Diary

Belonging to Philip Howard Clark, this diary explains how the aliens were planning to take over and what Conrad must do to stop them.



» Force Field

Conrad's friend Ian gives this to him on Level 2. It's a relatively useful device that can shield Conrad for a limited amount of time.



» Gun

Conrad's gun is never far from his side, which is handy, as he has to use it a lot. A dependable weapon that makes short work of anything.



» ID Card

Conrad is given this by the stranger he helps on the first stage. It allows him to get about in the city of New Washington.



» Key

There are lots of blocked-off areas on the world of Titan. These small devices will ensure that Conrad is able to get through all of them.



» Map

New Washington is a massive area with lots of different locations. This handy map highlights key areas, making navigation much easier.



» Shield

There are plenty out to get Conrad, so this shield, which can absorb four hits, is very useful. It can also be recharged at specific waypoints.



» Work Permit

Conrad needs to earn money to get fake papers, so he uses this work permit to get a variety of different jobs and therefore some cash.



» Tele Receiver

An amazingly handy device that Conrad can use for teleportation purposes. Simply select it then throw it to the floor.



» Tele Control

Once you've thrown your Tele Receiver to the floor, you can use this device to instantly transport to it. Very useful for navigating tricky areas.

Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy a few of Flashback's many highlights

The chase

Flashback's opening credits sequence where Conrad flees from his antagonists still manages to impress after all these years. It sets up the action beautifully and gives you a clear indication of the cinematic excellence that is to come as the game progresses.





Meeting Conrad

Sure, the techniques used to animate Conrad had been seen before, but watching the amnesiac agent as he leaps, runs and somersaults around the screen is still a joy. He also dresses far cooler than Mechner's Prince.



The pick-up

It sounds a trite thing, but picking up objects in *Flashback* is cool. Admittedly, seeing the same animation continuously used does grate a little, but it's still an impressive way of drawing you in to the on-screen action.



Frantic escape

There's a wonderful moment in one of *Flashback*'s early levels where Conrad has to frantically outrun a detonation – there's actually another in the game's finale, but this one sticks in the memory. Run, Conrad, run.



It's time to start running

Conrad's frantic dash through *Death Tower* is a massive change of pace from the rest of the game, with the player constantly kept on his toes by a seemingly never-ending line of enemies to escape.



Story time

This is clever. Upon reaching Ian, you're given your memories back in a *Total Recall*-style chair. You're then treated to an elaborate sequence that sets up the cinematic chase that you witnessed at *Flashback*'s beginning. Very new wave.



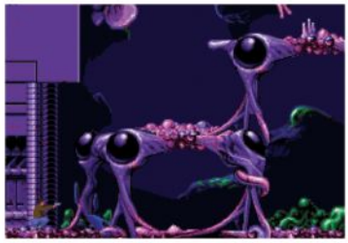
Breaking glass

It seems incredibly minor here, but there was a moment on Level 4 where we just couldn't progress any further. Frustrated, we took out Conrad's gun and shot a wall, only for it to disintegrate in a shattering of glass. Genius.



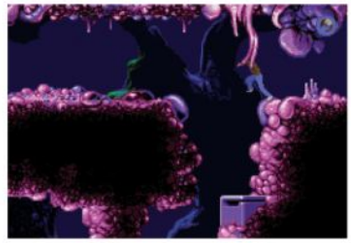
Job centre

While plenty of early videogames focused on a profession as their gameplay's main focus, not many of them saw you doing jobs within the framework of the actual game. Are there any earlier than *Flashback*? Let us know.



Meet the Morphs

If you thought Conrad's animation was impressive, wait until you see the Morphs. Devoid of their human skins, these rubbery aliens slide around the screen with a sickening realism that still looks absolutely fantastic.



Alien HQ

After traversing some dour locations, the aliens' home planet is a thing of beauty, capturing the stylish visuals of the opening jungle. It's all rather pink, but the strange plants and creatures that live in it make it feel like a real ecosystem.



Brain freeze

This is an exhilarating battle that has Conrad desperately trying to shut down the evil cerebrum, while fending off an infinite supply of Morphs. It's rather frustrating, but it still lodges itself within your memory.

Due to its massive success, Flashback spawned two sequels, only one of which received a commercial release



Fade To Black

By the time Paul Cuisset released *Flashback*'s sequel, the gaming world had gone 3D crazy. Playing like a cross between *Tomb Raider* and *Metal Gear Solid*, *Fade To Black* was a third-person adventure that utilised the now-popular over-the-shoulder viewpoint.

The story sees Conrad again captured and caught up in another elaborate plot for world domination. While it's extremely rough around the edges visually, *Fade To Black* has a far stronger plot.

The tricky control system and slow pace of Conrad make this a world away from the original game and almost kills it in places, but it remains a slick adventure that does capture the essence of *Flashback*.



Flashback Legends

Conrad was also set to appear in an adventure for the GBA, due in 2004. Unlike *Fade To Black*, the action once again reverted to the side-on gameplay of old and shared many elements with the original game. Locations were very similar and included New Delphi City, the Morph planet and a jungle, while familiar enemies were also present. The original cut-scenes had been replaced with a new comic strip look, and *Flashback Legends* introduced new characters as well.

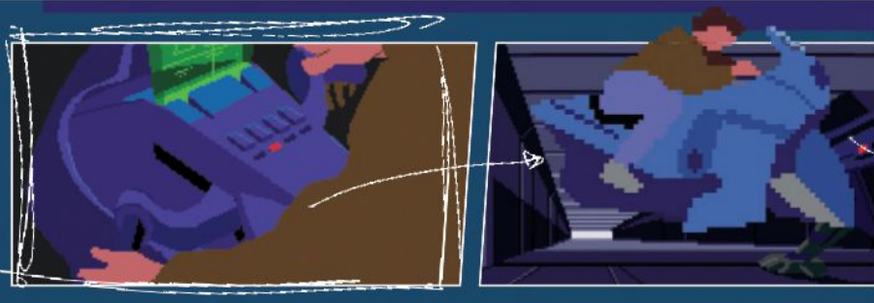
Sadly, as Delphine Software ran into financial difficulties, the game was eventually cancelled, seemingly doomed to disappear forever... until a leaked beta ROM appeared on the internet in 2008. Despite lots of bugs and technical issues, the ROM gave a good indication of how the final game may have turned out, and it looks truly gorgeous on its later stages. What a shame, then, that Conrad's adventures had to end in such a downbeat way.

Flashback – The Movie

One of the best things about *Flashback* is its gripping and enjoyable storyline. Despite the limitations of the home systems that it appeared on, Paul Cuisset uses a number of clever cinematic techniques – including, appropriately, a flashback scene – in order to immerse the player in Conrad's dangerous world. While it borrows heavily from many classic sci-fi films, *Flashback*'s tale is a surprisingly adult one and is an interesting cautionary tale. Knowing that not everyone is going to have the time to experience its greatness, we've put together these handy little storyboards, so you can review Conrad's story at your own pace. Enjoy!

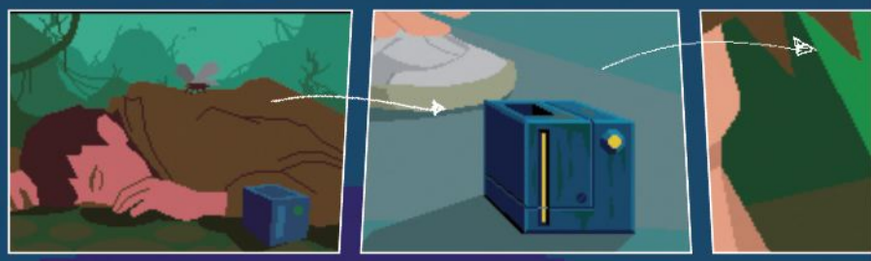
Part One

Our introduction to Conrad is watching his thudding feet as he desperately tries to escape two trenchcoat-wearing enemies. Despite quickly hopping on a nearby jetbike, his antagonists follow him in a large spacecraft. Several salvos later and Conrad's bike is hit and he crash lands in the jungles of Titan. After several moments of searching, he's eventually left for dead.



Part Two

Upon waking up, Conrad's first task is to retrieve the holocube that holds his memories. The jungle is filled with danger, but he discovers a wounded stranger who begs for help. After Conrad finds the stranger's teleporter, the grateful person teleports away but leaves behind an ID card. Conrad discovers the entrance to New Washington and, after paying for an anti-G belt, reaches his destination.



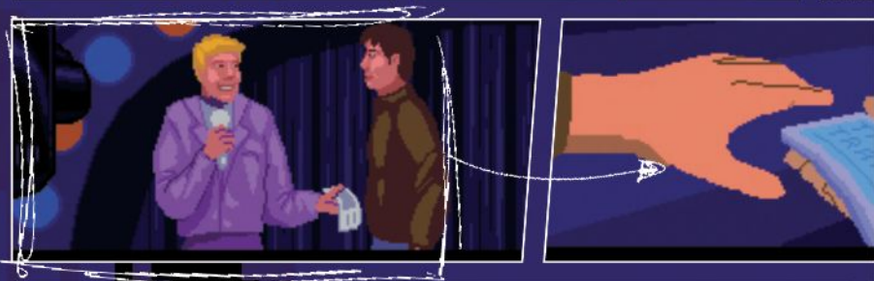
Part Three

In New Washington, Conrad seeks out his friend Ian, who restores his memory. The player soon discovers that Conrad has created a device that enables him to view the molecular structure of humans. He soon discovers that aliens are among the population and, fearing for his life, transfers his thoughts to the holocube before his memory is wiped.



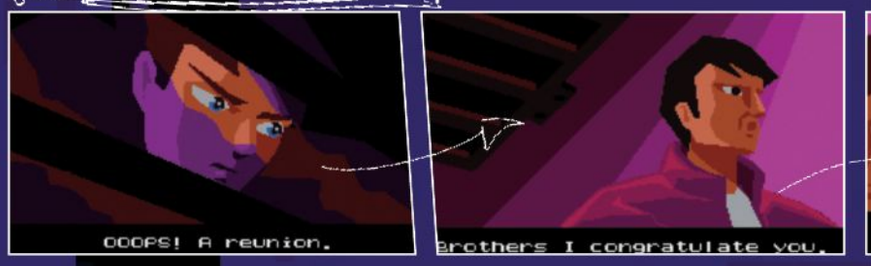
Part Four

Conrad quickly learns that he'll never earn the money to buy a ticket to Earth, so his best bet is taking part in the popular game show, *Death Tower*. After doing some jobs, Conrad earns enough money to pay a forger for papers so that he can enter *Death Tower*. He eventually wins the contest and immediately heads to Earth and seeks out the aliens' hideout.



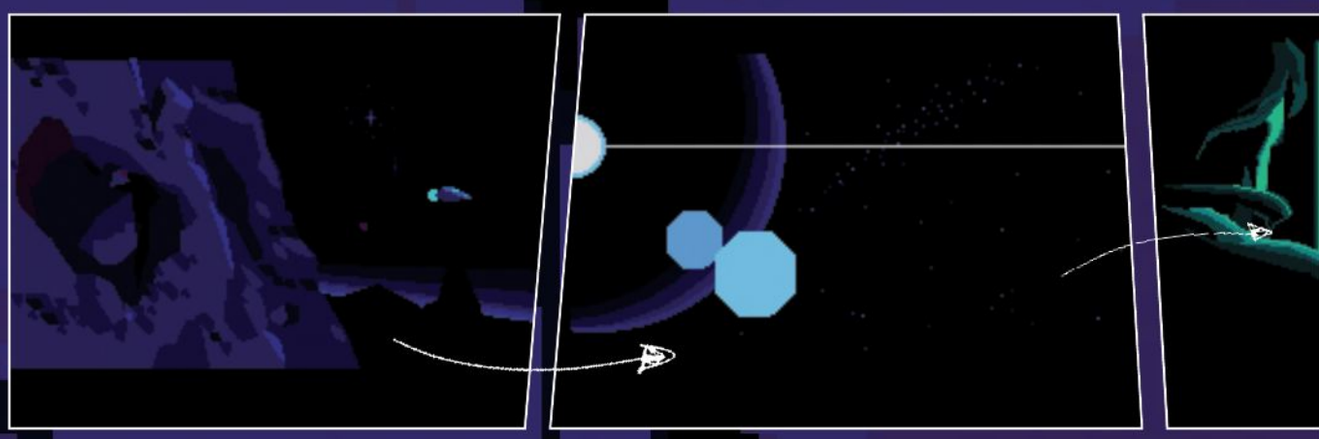
Part Five

When he reaches the hideout, he finds three aliens deep in discussion. Plans to take over the planet are moving faster than Conrad had anticipated, and he discovers that they are planning on assaulting Earth in their millions. Before he can do anything, the grate he was hiding behind gives way, revealing his location. Conrad is taken for interrogation. Things don't look good...



Part Six

Conrad escapes from prison and finds a teleporter that takes him to the aliens' planet. Once there, he discovers a human prisoner but is unable to help before aliens murder him. Conrad is given an atomic charger and picks up the prisoner's diary, which tells him how to blow up the planet. After placing the charge, Conrad flees into space but soon discovers that he's not in any known galaxy. He is last seen entering suspended animation after putting a message on his screen that implies that it may be some time before he is rescued.




REPLAY
ANTI G SYSTEM
OK
STANDARD
Then I save the contents of my memory and send it to Ian
"I HAVE ERASED HIS MEMORY."
Thanks to our knowledge, the humans are now capable
A SPY... Throw the wretch
It's impossible for me to calculate my return trajectory.
The galaxy I am in today doesn't appear on any of our navigation charts.
I'll probably drift in space for a very long time...

MICHAEL JACKSON'S MOONWALKER

"WHO'S BAD?"



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MEGA DRIVE

HISTORY



Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* was not a good film. In fact, it's probably one of the worst movies we've ever seen, and we'd rather melt our eyeballs with hot pokers then have to ever sit through it again. Yes, it had great music (if you like listening to the king of pop that is) but the movie itself was nothing more than a glorified vanity project for someone, who at that point in time was arguably the world's biggest star. So it comes as somewhat of a surprise to find that even though the film itself is a complete and utter turd, the actual Mega Drive outing turned out to be pretty good fun.

Each level required Jackson to hunt around the multi-tiered stages in search of missing children who had been kidnapped by the notorious Mr Big. Upon finding the necessary number of missing children, Bubbles the chimp would appear – no really – leap onto Jackson's shoulder and point him in the direction of the level's exit.

Before he could leave however, Mr Big appeared, and after mocking the moonwalker's futile efforts to capture him, would then send a load of bad guys for Jackson to deal with. What followed was easily the highlight of the game, and even now, some 16 years on, it never gets old.

Obviously not wanting his adoring public seeing him resort to fisticuffs, Michael Jackson used the power of magic to defeat his many enemies. Holding down the relevant button for a few seconds would release his hat, which would fly out boomerang fashion, destroying anyone it comes into contact with. Resist the urge to let fly with your trilby of doom however and Michael (and everyone else on-screen) launched into a stunning dance routine that culminated with the destruction of the rest of Jackson's temporary dance troupe. And if you thought seeing a group of humans go through the motions of Smooth Criminal was funny, wait until you see what the zombies and dogs on later levels get up to. Aaooow!





THE MAKI



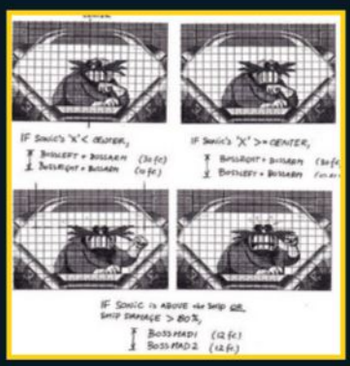
Conceived as a stop gap and developed in a hurry, Sonic Spinball still stands as the greatest thing that could have come out of another game's production delays. We talk with Peter Morawiec about how this classic came to be

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KID CHAMELEON
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1992

THE OOZE
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1995

COMIX ZONE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR: 1995





» Some of the earliest original storyboards from *Sonic Spinball*'s production.

With a title such as *Sonic Spinball*, as entertaining and well-designed as the game itself might be, it's hard to really understand the story of its creation without first putting a little perspective on some of the circumstances that surround it. In fact, it's sometimes hard to imagine certain games ever having seen the light of day without a very special set of circumstances. In the case of *Sonic Spinball*, it's all about timing.

For those who may have spent the early Nineties living in a cave, the 1992 holiday season had been a very important one for Sega. It saw the release of what would become the bestselling game ever released for the Mega Drive: *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. A title credited not only with giving Sega a much-needed sales push in its battle for console superiority with the SNES, but also with giving the title character a final and hardy thrust into the spotlight, with making secure his place in history as a gaming icon. It would be no exaggeration to say that *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* had ensured that Sonic would become Sega's most important and lucrative piece of intellectual property.

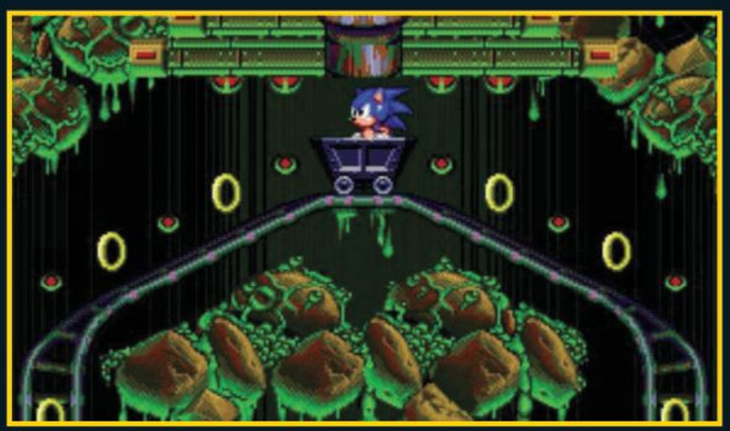
Considering the incredible success of *Sonic 2*'s holiday release, it's only natural that Sega of America would want to follow up the timely release with another title in the same vein. The only problem was that it had become quite clear that the direct sequel and only other *Sonic* title then in development, *Sonic The Hedgehog 3*, would not be ready for release until well after the upcoming holiday season. If there was to be another *Sonic* game ready for every good boy and girl's stocking, something would need to be done – and fast.

"Following the success of *Sonic 1* and *2*, SOA management desired another *Sonic* game for the 1993 holiday season," says Peter Morawiec, the designer at Sega who would later go on to found Luxoflux and Isopod Labs. "Once Sonic Team communicated that they would miss that window, somebody at HQ must have asked whether a smaller, simpler *Sonic*-related title could be developed. The marketing/research folks indicated that *Sonic*'s casino levels were among the favourites, birthing the idea for the overall direction. I honestly don't know who came up with that, but it sounded fun and doable, so STI [Sega Technical Institute] jumped on it."

Now, given nothing more than a relatively loose idea of what direction the game may take and a previously established deadline, the team at STI were left to come up with some way of expanding on the concept of *Sonic 2*'s Casino Night Zone; a way of extracting the enjoyable aspects of this single level and expanding on them broadly enough to form a concept around which an entire game could be based. To somehow capture the magic of the level and take it in a new and interesting direction.

"We were given a pretty free rein to brainstorm," says Peter. "Everyone understood that we couldn't and shouldn't try to compete with the mainline *Sonic* franchise, so some departure was expected. I enjoyed the casino levels, but I was also really inspired by an Amiga game of the day called *Pinball Dreams*, which was about the nicest pinball game I've seen. I envisioned more of the real pinball mechanics brought into Sonic's world and felt it presented a truly unique proposition. Collaborating with team members Kurt

"Sonic 3 would not be ready until after the holiday season. Something needed to be done"



SONIC SPINBALL: THE ROLLER COASTER



UNVEILED IN FEBRUARY 2010, Sonic Spinball is a moderately sized rollercoaster located in the Adventure Land area of the Alton Towers theme park. Although the ride was not originally designed with a *Sonic* theme in mind, having previously existed as Spinball Whizzer, the ride became part of a sponsorship deal between Sega and Alton Towers that included both the rollercoaster and a *Sonic*-themed hotel room. As such, the ride was shut down and reworked to a suitable theme. The new vision for the ride was brought about through predominantly cosmetic changes, such as a new red and blue paint scheme, a number of new signs, new props, and even a certain amount of voice work by Sonic's current voice actor. The rebranding of the ride was not taken lightly by Alton Towers, which hosted a grand opening event and ribbon-cutting attended by both representatives of Sega and the blue blur himself.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** STI
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **GENRE:** ACTION

THE MAKING OF





IT'S LIKE GILLIGAN'S ISLAND

TO SAY THAT initial reactions to *Sonic Spinball* were a little mixed might be a bit of an understatement. Over the years, however, it seems clear that the game's legacy and place in the canon of *Sonic* games is a secure one. Since its original release, ignoring even the Game Gear and Master System ports and their re-releases, *Spinball* has been released in one form or another no less than six times. The game has been included in the *Sega Smash Pack* for the Dreamcast; *Sonic Mega Collection* for the Xbox, PlayStation 2, GameCube and PC; and the *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection* for the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. It's also currently available for download on the Nintendo Wii's Virtual Console. Had the game been included in *Sonic Jam* for the Sega Saturn, it would hold the distinction of having been available for a major system in every generation since the Mega Drive.



Peterson, Justin Chin and John Duggan, I created an animation to showcase these ideas. We demoed this video to Sega's board, which went over very well, and STI got the green light to proceed."

With the project given the go-ahead, Peter was placed at the helm of perhaps the most important game Sega would release that year. He was given control over Sega's very own mascot, over what was in many ways the public face of the company. Not a bad break for a rookie developer.

"I think the animated demo, management's willingness to take a chance on a newbie designer, as well as a bit of luck, landed me the job," he says. "I'm still very grateful to Mr Sugano and then studio head Roger Hector for that break."

Considering the trade-off between the vote of confidence implicit in the commission to work on a game centring around such an important character and the need to ensure that this new release lives up to the standard set by the previous entries, it's unsurprising that Peter's initial feelings seem somewhat mixed: "I felt honoured but also quite overwhelmed. Development time was short and Sonic Team set the quality bar very high, so we had our work cut out for us."

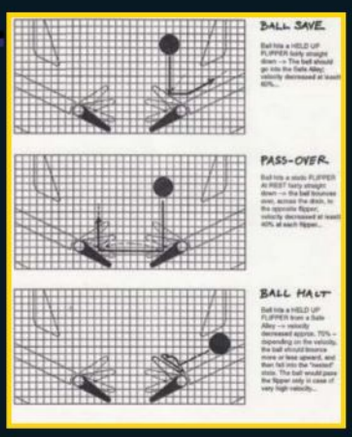
Now that the concept had been cemented and with a team in place, the rush was on. If *Sonic Spinball* was to be finished in time to hit the shelves for holiday shoppers, it would need to be completed in well under a year – a very tight development schedule for a game that would require the level of quality demanded by any *Sonic* title of this era. Amazingly, considering not only this strict timeline but also the possible effects that a failure to capitalise on *Sonic*'s new-found popularity could have on Sega of America's bottom line, Peter seems to remember encountering very little in the way of corporate pressure surrounding the game's development.

"If Sonic 3 had progressed a little quicker, the world may have never got to see this unique game"

"I can only assume management was under heavy pressure from SOA to deliver, but to Roger's and Sugano's credit, they shielded the team from that very well," continues Peter. "Also, with *Spinball* being an SOA-commissioned title, there was no interference from SOJ. Early on, Roger brought in two seasoned contractors to handle the core programming: Dennis Koble and Lee Actor of Sterling Silver Software, developers of EA's early *PGA Tour Golf* games – fantastic guys to work with. Sonic Team could spare no talent, but most of the remaining STI members were enlisted, and the company also sent us an excellent artist from Japan, Katsuhiko Sato, for a few months."







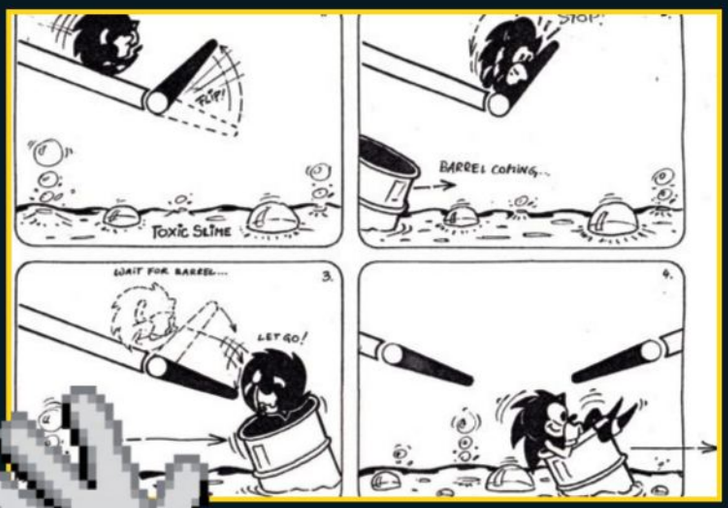
» The game's design documents break down every interactive aspect of each of the tables.

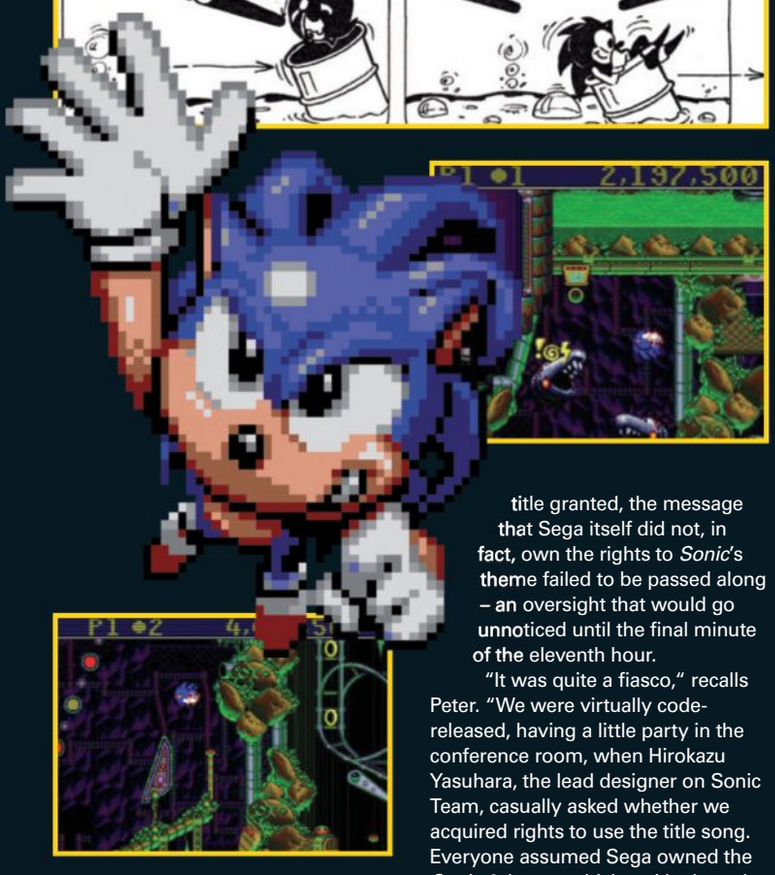
Despite the decision to bring in veteran talent from outside the Institute to help speed along the project's development, in order to meet the deadlines presented a certain amount of streamlining would need to be done. In fact, changes would need to be made to even the most fundamental ways in which games for the Mega Drive were typically written, as Peter explains: "Much of the code was written in C, not assembly, which was somewhat unusual back in the day because you needed to be as close to the hardware as possible to get the most out of it. Lee and Dennis went with C due to the time constraints, so there were some frame rate concerns and optimising."

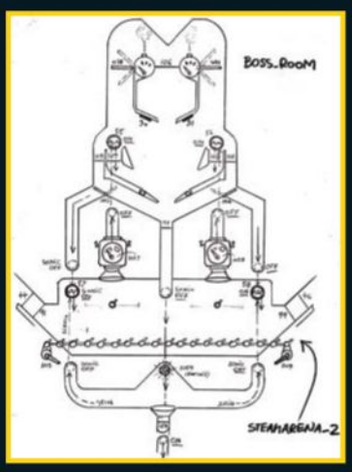
The decision to move further away from system language and squeeze performance from the system in another fashion would seem to have been the correct one. Regardless of how many late nights the project may have required, when you look over *Spinball*'s development schedule, the progress made in such a short time is nothing if not impressive. In two short months, between 15 June and August, the project developed from a roughly playable first build, featuring nothing more than the scrolling and collision systems and 80 per cent of the character animations played on a single unfinished level, to a fully completed, ready to ship final build. In 61 days it progressed from something not even suitable for a press demo to a fully fleshed-out game. Amazingly, with such a short time to work, the team had managed to produce not just a game, but a quality game.

More amazing still is that by all accounts this production work went along smoothly and without drama. Well, perhaps that is something of an exaggeration. There is one piece of *Sonic Spinball* lore, one minor horror story that we just couldn't resist asking to hear a little more about: legend has it that somehow, with the commission to work on a new *Sonic*

» Tricks based on combining aspects of both pinball and traditional *Sonic* gameplay were created early on.







» [Mega Drive] Much like a real pinball table, *Spinball* is filled with loops and ball catches.



» [Mega Drive] Collecting the level's Chaos Emeralds grants access to the boss.



» [Mega Drive] The game's representation of a real table's LED display adds a little extra flair.





title granted, the message that Sega itself did not, in fact, own the rights to *Sonic*'s theme failed to be passed along – an oversight that would go unnoticed until the final minute of the eleventh hour.

"It was quite a fiasco," recalls Peter. "We were virtually code-released, having a little party in the conference room, when Hirokazu Yasuhara, the lead designer on Sonic Team, casually asked whether we acquired rights to use the title song. Everyone assumed Sega owned the *Sonic 2* theme, which we'd adapted for *Spinball*, where in fact it was a one-shot licence from a Japanese band, Dreams Come True. So, Howard Drossin, our composer, was tasked to create a brand new theme in something like two hours!"

Deadlines met, production work done and a new theme song composed, there was now nothing more to do than to sit back and wait to see how the release would fare on the market. To see how the gaming public would react to *Sonic*'s first step away from the constraints of the platforming genre. Unsurprisingly, considering the level of attention and focus that Sega's spiky blue mascot had acquired since his debut in 1991, the wait for the response from fans and media was not without its own stresses.

"I knew the game would face serious acceptance challenges from *Sonic* fans and the gaming media," admits Peter. "It was just a different animal, but I think the team did a great job, all things considered. I went to Europe for the holidays just prior to the game's release, full of apprehension. This was before the internet, and I did not make any phone calls to the States while away, so it was an amazing feeling to return and learn we've sold a ton of units. Clearly, *Spinball* benefited hugely from Sonic's popularity, and I've always wished we had the time to polish it properly. It's ultimately one of those polarising games, loved by some and disliked by others, but I'm happy with its overall success and fan base."

Though the game may still not have won over some who have trouble accepting the *Sonic* franchise's expansion into the realm of spin-off gaming, it's hard to imagine anyone who worked on the title being truly displeased with the game's overall reception.

The game has been re-released numerous times and is available for play on no less than 11 different platforms. Last February it was even bestowed with the very distinct honour of having a rollercoaster named after it (see 'Sonic Spinball: The Rollercoaster' boxout), earning Sega's mascot a clear victory over a certain rotund plumber in terms of who has the best theme park ride.

In the end, if there is one lesson that can be learnt from the story of *Sonic Spinball*'s creation, it must be this: the next time you feel inclined to get upset about a production delay, next time you feel yourself getting a little impatient over the wait for a long-anticipated game, take a moment to remember that if *Sonic 3* had progressed just a little quicker, if its release had been moved up just a few short months, the world may have never got to see the unique and interesting blend of pinball and platforming that *Sonic Spinball* had to offer.

TOP 25 MEGA DRIVE GAMES

As the Mega Drive is now 25 years old, we felt it was the perfect opportunity for Retro Gamer readers to pick their favourite games. Were yours included? Read on…



Disney's Aladdin

DEVELOPER: VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

25 **Of all of** the versions, the Mega Drive's *Aladdin* was best. Surprisingly put together by legendary developer David Perry in just 99 days, it may have been a platform game – the staple genre of the majority of film tie-ins from the Eighties and early Nineties – but the cartoon graphics, silky smooth animation and diverse nature of the 11 levels was inspired by *Sonic*. It therefore had a frenetic pace and numerous collectables with flowing action that remains great fun.

Jungle Strike

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

24 **A chopper title** that was so good it kept a popular series going for three more games, *Jungle Strike*'s strategical elements and full-on airborne blasting ensures its worthy place in our readers' top 25. The wealth of missions meant that gamers played for lengthy periods of time and, while let down by the sound every now and then, there remained a feeling of being immersed in a strong battle against an intelligent enemy. Well-ported, its natural home was within this original Mega Drive version where, aggressive war-mongering aside, design and control reigned supreme.





Rocket Knight Adventures

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

23 **Seamless blending of** levels and the feeling that this first Konami game for the Mega Drive threw every graphical trick it could into a big pot, *Rocket Knight Adventures* was impressive. This was a game that oozed innovation (save for the boss battles) and higher difficulty levels lent it a challenge no gamer would want to live without experiencing.



Shining Force

DEVELOPER: CLIMAX ENTERTAINMENT
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RPG

22 **A shining example** of a fine fantasy RPG, this turn-based tactical exploration of the Kingdom of Guardiana had the ability to see enemies in advance, giving players ample time to work out the correct and most intriguing strategy to employ in order to bloodthirstily slay them in combat. With elements of steampunk and a well-devised plot that employed humour and involved a great range of characters, *Shining Force*'s grid-based action and slick presentation made it an instant classic and it was recognised as such by many who played it back in 1992. Sure, there are some bizarre moments in the English translation – Lug, Luke, gah, it's so confusing – but that didn't stop it from getting into *Mega*'s Top 33 of all time and neither, it seems, did it bar it from entering our Top 25. Play it again today on iOS (like many other Sega classics) for pure retro gaming on the go.

ToeJam & Earl

DEVELOPER: JOHNSON VOORSANGER PRODUCTIONS
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE

21 **The cover screamed** 'jammin' and it seems this totally cool and chilled-out game struck a chord with readers. Everyone likes a laugh, and ToeJam & Earl were a comedy duo to rival some of the greatest. The slow build-up at the start of this top-down action game soon gave way to plentiful giggles, and the developers no doubt had a ball when packing in their belly dancers, nerds and bogeymen among other assorted weird happenings, most of which parodied urban culture in the Eighties. *ToeJam & Earl* came into its own, in particular, when the two-player mode kicked in to allow gamers to share the experience with a buddy. While it wasn't a hard game to beat, the tone of the game drove players forward (albeit sometimes at a sedentary pace) and there was a sense of never quite knowing what was to come.



QuackShot Starring Donald Duck

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

19 **Perhaps readers were** dewy-eyed over Dewey (and Huey and Louie). *QuackShot* proved that older gamers could enjoy some Disney action, but the beautiful graphics were marred by slow gameplay. This was perhaps better for newbies.



John Madden Football '92

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** SPORTS

18 **The game may** have lacked NFL and NFLPA licences, but EA's second title to feature the legendary American football commentator started the annual tweak-the-gameplay trend that kicked off a long-running franchise. And boy, it was a joy to watch that crowd celebrate.



Thunder Force III

DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

17 **Like *R-Type*, this** horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up excelled throughout, searing eyeballs with sharp sprites, polished parallax scrolling and bad-ass backgrounds that made the rat-a-tat waves of battling baddies and their barrage of bullets a pleasure. Great bosses too.



Golden Axe

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

16 **One of the most** well known Mega Drive games in existence, even for those that didn't play it. *Golden Axe*'s fun two-player mode made this scrolling fighter shine, as players head butted, kicked and sliced their way to victory with more than a nod or two to the *Conan* films.



Ghouls 'n Ghosts

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM/SEGA
YEAR: 1989 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

15 **Straight from the** arcades to home machines, this run-and-gun classic (converted by Sega) is just as frustrating as the arcade original. It remains a fantastic port however and had owners grinning at their SNES-owning friends. Until *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* came along…





Desert Strike

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **The subject matter** of *Desert Strike* is as relevant today as it was back then, with the affairs of the Middle East still firmly on the agenda. As befitting such a scenario, it was rather political, referencing the inability of the UN to take direct action against a war-mongering dictator and his army. However, it was also a sophisticated shoot-'em-up that was a world away from the more conventional examples of the genre, proving so popular, it was made for a host of other machines. Gulf War inspiration aside, *Desert Strike* had a rather fresh approach to war, although lead designer Mike Posehn had never made a game before he tackled this project. He ensured the game had everything you needed for a rich experience, be it maps, cut-scenes to explain the action or mission details to work out what to do next. The five main missions were supplemented with ten sub-assignments, lending depth and variety, as well as ensuring that gamers would be able to feast their eyes on the wonderful graphics and let their ears take in the Ron Hubbard sounds of war for a number of hours.



Dynamite Headdy

DEVELOPER: TREASURE
YEAR RELEASED: 1994 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

14 **Developed by Treasure,** the bright, colourful visuals of *Dynamite Headdy* will have stuck in the heads of all the gamers who tried this genre-busting platformer back in 1994. An all-so-knowing and relevant tale of a puppet called Headdy in pursuit of a girl's attention, it could easily have gone down the path of *Mario* (which, admittedly is a great route for games to take). After all, Headdy discovers that his girl and his friends have been kidnapped. What to do? Go and rescue them.

But where *Dynamite Headdy* succeeded was in turning perception upside down, literally at times. It also relied on getting the right head on, whether it be a strength-increasing offensive noggin or one that would let him snooze. It meant that, even for platform fans, it was a new experience, helped along by lots of useful characters.





Flashback

DEVELOPER: DELPHINE SOFTWARE INTERNATIONAL
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

13 **It is the** best selling French game of all time, according to Guinness World Records, and US Gold brought it to the wider masses. The way the screens slid in rather than scrolled when the player neared the edge, gave it an old-school feel even when it was released in 1992, but the rotoscoping and use of FMV made it feel part of the future. *Flashback* became a massive hit and was marketed as being a CD-ROM game on a cartridge due to its huge scope and size. All of the backdrops were hand drawn, and so the style was very much unlike anything that came before it. This lent it an ambitious edge which could be seen in the manner of play, the realms of role-play coming to the fore in level two and enemies suddenly feeling sharper and more intelligent the deeper you go.

Streets Of Rage

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 ■ **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

12 **At the time** of release, many regarded *Streets Of Rage* to be the Mega Drive's best fighter. We won't say it was the best ever, for reasons that will undoubtedly become clear later, but it was a two-player combat game of excellence that had scores of enemies battling against you over eight levels. A worthy alternative to Capcom's *Final Fight*, which was exceedingly popular on Nintendo's SNES, it may have been a little slow (particularly if you played as Adam) but there was no denying that the game's combat made it highly satisfying to play. It had a great multiplayer mode as well, giving it the edge over the SNES ports of Capcom's popular fighter. Add in some truly astonishing trance-style music, courtesy of Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima, and it becomes easy to see why Sega's scrolling fighter remains so popular.



Strider

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM/SEGA
YEAR RELEASED: 1990 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



11 **This is quite** simply one of the finest arcade ports of its time on Sega's machine and it still manages to impress today. Sega handled the ambitious port itself, and the end result is a magnificent early release for the Mega Drive that proved just how powerful the 16-bit console was. *Strider* remains beautifully animated as he fights his way through the game's huge levels and, while certain sections are prone to some rather irritating sprite flicker, it's still amazing to see just how polished Sega's port actually is. Full of inventive level design - including the best second level ever - and featuring a bewildering array of crazy bosses to battle through, *Strider* is Capcom at its most inventive and creative and it remains a sensational platformer. Filled with dazzling set pieces and excellent tunes, *Strider* on the Mega Drive was arguably one of the best ports of the game, with only the Sharp X68000, PC Engine and PlayStation versions bettering it. Darran is still in shock that it didn't make your top ten.





Thunder Force IV

DEVELOPER: TECHNOSOFT
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

10 **Okay, so we** kind of glossed over *Thunder Force III* and that is because, as great as it was, many readers feel this is better. For those reading in America, you may know this as *Lightening Force: Quest For The Darkstar*, a game that rocked to a synth beat and locked to a hair-pulling regional program that meant European Mega Drive and Genesis owners couldn't play the Japanese version.

Thunder Force IV wasn't a gigantic leap from *Thunder Force III*. It was a bit of gameplay tinkering here, a little polish of the graphics there, and yet the result is considered by many to be the best of the series. It may still be a shoot-'em-up that scrolls to the side, but you could go up further than the boundaries of the 14-inch telly that you had in your bedroom and it felt as if you had loads more freedom.

Looking as if the graphic artists had stayed up day and night for months on end due to the incredible detail of the backdrops and sprites, it is fair to say that the programmers, on the other hand, may have had some sleep. There wasn't so much innovative thinking going on, especially in terms of speed where slow-down was an issue at times but not enough to make you wince.

However, if something was achieved, then it was a sheer show of power. If nothing else, the game, while starting to feel as if it was just offering standard shoot-'em-up fare, showed the true power of the Mega Drive and you sensed that the achievement could not have been possible on other consoles. With the history of the series behind it, *Thunder Force IV* could afford to push on incrementally rather than make a wholesale change and, today, if you were going to go back and play one of the series' games, you should certainly make a bee-line for this.

Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR RELEASED: 1990 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

9 **Although you may** think home consoles were awash with *Mickey Mouse* games, this was actually only the second outing for Disney's anthropomorphic rodent. It helped to cement the Mega Drive's reputation as a must-have machine, such was the addictive nature and jaw-dropping graphics that combined to make the game so loved. Beautiful parallax scrolling and a range of animated faces brought the world and Mickey to life. It wasn't an incredibly hard game and the obstacles and traps that lay before Mickey were by no means insurmountable. But who could fail to fall for a charming butt-stomp that dispatches Mickey's enemies? Not us.





The Revenge Of Shinobi

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7
YEAR RELEASED: 1989 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

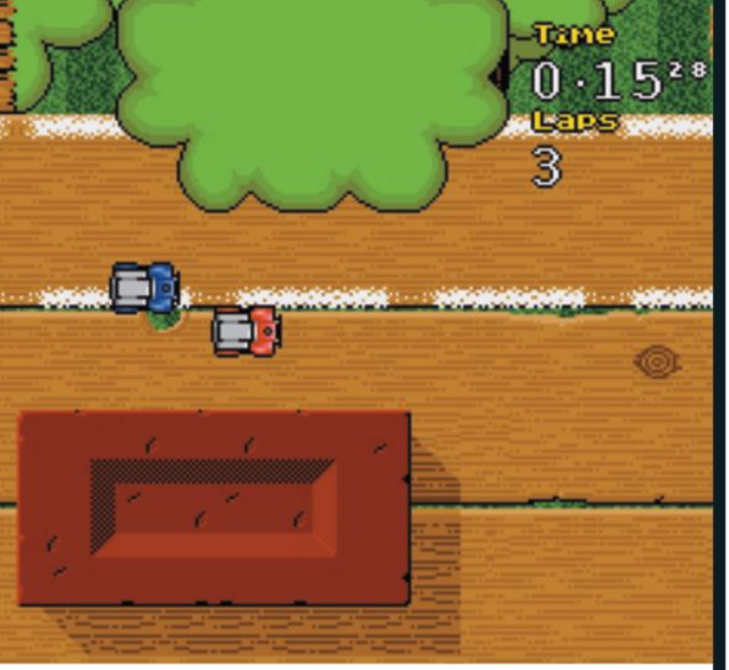
8 **Revenge is such** an ugly word, isn't it? But, without wishing to sound corny, it made for a very sweet game. The sequel to *Shinobi*'s 1987 debut turned Joe Musashi into a household name and, while he pounded the streets of his eight districts in a bid to confront Neo Zeed, he got to biff Batman and spring a surprise on Spider-Man among an assortment of other well-known hero-baddies. Such blasé use of said icons (explained away by the doings of a shape shifter) got Sega into some bother and it had to make some later revisions. But that only provides for what is a good yarn – not that a well-animated, sonically beautiful and addictive game would need such assistance.

Road Rash II

DEVELOPER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** RACING

7 ***Road Rash II*** is one of only two racing games in the top 25, showing that either the Mega Drive wasn't really blessed with a vast selection of such titles, or that our readers couldn't give two hoots about many of them. Great for one or two players, and having three bike classes in Ultra Light, Nitro Class and Super Bike, *Road Rash II* had a number of options that included a split-screen game, pure head-to-head and some smacks to opposing riders' faces. The learning curve was spot on too, with the difficulty increased after each section. The good news was that you could just keep going until you fell asleep (not while racing, we hope) and, once you had secured your racing passwords, you could start from where you finished off.





Micro Machines Turbo Tournament '96

DEVELOPER: SUPERSONIC SOFTWARE
YEAR RELEASED: 1995 **GENRE:** RACING

6 **While basically *Micro Machines 2,*** this version of the top-down tiny racing game was exclusive to the Sega Mega Drive. The game itself was already an enhancement of its predecessor, with different handling techniques that depended on the vehicles and new cars. *Turbo Tournament '96* added the track construction kit from the PC version of *MM2*, as well as updated tracks, meaning that Mega Drive owners could feel special and play the best version of the sequel too. This game wasn't produced by Codemasters but instead was contracted out to Supersonic, a company that was able to play to its strengths and produce a truly fantastic party game.

Sonic The Hedgehog 3

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1994 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



5 **Sonic's first entry** in our list and it's predictably high. Sonic's last main Mega Drive game was an impressive refinement of the series, featuring everything that had made the hedgehog so popular but on a far larger scale. Notable for introducing Knuckles to the series, *Sonic 3* also used the lock-in technology that had been created by Sonic Team and Sega Technical Institute for *Sonic & Knuckles*. It's a fantastic platformer with excellent visuals, super slick animation and a superb soundtrack – but according to you, it's not Sonic's best Mega Drive outing.

Sonic The Hedgehog

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



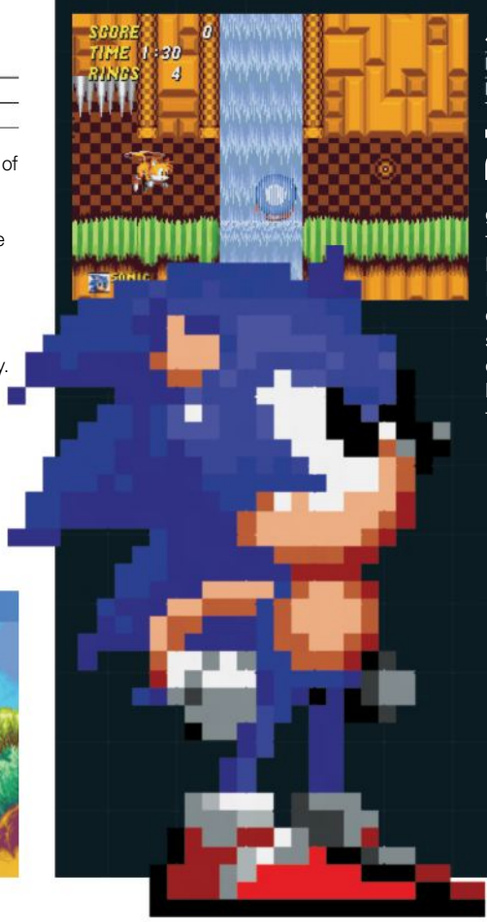
4 **A true blue** classic. *Sonic The Hedgehog* was eventually bundled with the Mega Drive in a move by Sega's Tom Kalinske to draw interest away from the evil-sounding *Altered Beast* that was currently packaged with the console. This shrewd move allowed Sega's new mascot to go toe-to-toe with Mario – not that the fat plumber would ever manage to keep up with Sonic's blistering speed. Bold, sleek and cool, *Sonic The Hedgehog* was as much a statement about Sega's attitude as it was a superb platformer, and it's little wonder that it went on to become one of the system's best games.

Gunstar Heroes

DEVELOPER: TREASURE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

3 **Treasure's Mega Drive** debut is one of the greatest calling cards of the 16-bit generation. Packed with imagination, and pulling off graphical tricks that the machine was supposedly incapable of, *Gunstar Heroes* was a revelation upon release and remains a stunning achievement. Like many Treasure games it has superlative visuals, but also understands the importance of great gameplay. *Gunstar Heroes* has tight controls, a clever weapon system (you can combine weapons) and well-structured levels that culminate in fantastic, imaginative boss fights. Treasure would go on to release five more games for Sega's console, but its astounding debut is clearly your favourite.





Sonic The Hedgehog 2

DEVELOPER: SONIC TEAM
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

2 **What? More Sonic?** Oh yes – but then Sega's blue mascot was a major icon, and never more so than on the Mega Drive. *Sonic 2* was able to pick up on the momentum of the first game that pretty much every Mega Drive owner would have played to death, but Sega knew it had to be special. It was released on 24 November 1992 on an occasion that was dubbed 'Sonic 2uesday'. It became the Mega Drive's best-selling title and players once again collected rings and got Sonic to run as fast as they could, but in came spin dashing and Sonic's partner Tails, whom a second player could control. A genius solution to Sonic potentially dashing away was to have Tails make his way back to him automatically. *Sonic 2* is, and there is no doubt here, the hedgehog's finest gaming moment.







"Streets Of Rage 2 is possibly the best game ever made. Would have given it 20 points if I could"
THE LAIRD

Streets Of Rage 2

DEVELOPER: SEGA AM7 ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1992 ■ **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

We were surprised that *Streets Of Rage 2* took the top spot as we genuinely thought that it would be a *Sonic* game sitting at the top of your list. Sega's superb sequel strode into the lead very quickly though, and soon began to amass huge support making it undoubtedly your number one Mega Drive game of all time.

Everything about Sega's sequel was bigger, bolder, and well… better. The most noticeable difference was the truly spectacular looking sprites that looked far beefier than the weedy looking efforts shown in the original game. The gameplay had also been greatly refined, with special moves being granted to each character, including an attack from Axel Stone that looked a lot like Ryu's Dragon Punch. As with Capcom's *Final Fight*, pulling off a special move was a great way of defeating multiple enemies at once and also granted you a small amount of invulnerability (at the expense of some of your precious health).

Such strategic use of these moves was vital in order to achieve victory in a game that was hard going no matter how good you became or what difficulty level you decided to play on. However, it was clear that Sega didn't go down the path of merely bolting on a few extras. It re-jigged the entire game and was bigger and better in so many respects, not least in the aforementioned chunkier characters that moved with far greater animation than before.

New characters were also introduced, namely Max Thunder, a huge lumbering tank, and Eddie 'Skate' Hunter, a fast-paced skater who, despite his young age, had no problem leaping onto the backs of strangers and punching their faces in. Blaze Fielding and Axel Stone also returned, ensuring that players would have no problem finding a fighter that would suit their playing style.

The co-operative fighting of the original once again came to the fore, allowing players to team up to pull off silly, showy moves that would decimate enemies and allow you to combat *Streets Of Rage 2*'s occasionally tough difficulty spikes. Bosses were tougher as well, and a lot more inventive, ensuring that you'd keep plugging away until you had scrapped your way through all eight stages.

Sega had even improved the excellent soundtrack, once again securing Yuzo Koshiro and Motohiro Kawashima to create some stirring tunes to accompany all the on-screen fisticuffs. It remains one of the best Mega Drive soundtracks of all time, with the musicians putting in just as much effort as the programmers to ensure that Sega's sequel was better in every possible way. Everything about Sega's ambitious sequel was massively enhanced, culminating in the best scrolling fighter for any 16-bit system. Hell, for many it remains the best scrolling fighter of all time.

Five reasons why it's great

- Each character has their own unique moves and abilities
- There are loads of weapons to pick up and use, from knives to metal bars
- It has one of the best techno soundtracks heard in any videogame we've played
- Graphically superb, the characters are arcade-chunky and the backdrops ooze quality
- Action moves left to right and up and down giving a feeling of exploration as you biff opponents



The Mega Drive – or Genesis as it's also known – remains Sega's greatest selling console, selling over 40 million units since its release. Here we explain why you should be building the ultimate collection to Sega's ambitious 16-bit console and highlights its best games and peripherals

SEGA ME



» **Manufacturer:** Sega » **Models:** Mega Drive, Mega Drive 2, Mega Drive 3 » **Launched:** 1988 (Japan), 1989 (US), 1990 (Europe) » **Country of origin:** Japan

GA DRIVE

The Collector's Guide



» The Super Magic Drive was a copying device, allowing gamers to transfer ROM data to floppy disks or PCs.

» The Sega Mega Drive had numerous updates over the years. The Mega Drive II shown here was first released in 1993.

Why it's collectable

While Sega is no longer a major player in the videogame hardware world today, the legacy of its 1988 release – the Sega Mega Drive – still lives on. Despite being discontinued in the late Nineties and moved aside to make way for its younger 32-bit sibling, countless gamers are still lining up today to secure a library of Mega Drive classics.

The Mega Drive was not only set to be the successor to the Master System, but it was also a direct result of Hayao Nakayama's desire to bring the coin-op experience home. By modifying its System-16 arcade hardware, Sega intended to create a console every bit as powerful, and one that made it easy to port arcade releases to. While this creation held a lot of promise and potential, its eventual October release in Japan was overshadowed by *Super Mario Bros 3* on the Nintendo Famicom, released a week earlier.

However, its importance was soon recognised once it arrived in the West. On 30 November, 1990, Sega brought its console over to European shores to build upon the strong foundations that the Master System had already cemented. With arcade ports of *Altered Beast*, *Golden Axe* and *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* available from day one, the Mega Drive had finally found success – or at least the start of it.

Aggressive advertising campaigns, Electronic Art's unauthorised reverse engineering of the hardware, and a thriving import market would begin to push Sega closer to success, but this didn't truly begin to accelerate until 23 June, 1990. On this day an instant hit was born – bearing stunning visuals, fast gameplay and an iconic soundtrack, all of which were accompanied by an attitude-filled mascot – Sonic The Hedgehog. The speedy blue mammal's emergence marked what may be the most important event in Sega's history, and the Mega Drive's lifetime. The UK based publication *Mean Machines Magazine* singled it out as 'the best platform game on the Mega Drive' to date and their assessment was spot on – not only did the title go on to sell 15 million copies worldwide and become the start of a long series, Sonic also became an internationally recognisable character. The shelves of Woolworths and the back pages of the Argos catalogue were flooded with *Sonic The Hedgehog* pencil cases, jigsaws, comics, clothing and sweets.

Whilst this is only a snippet of the 16-bit system's story, retro gamers often find themselves returning to the Mega Drive to indulge in its plethora of software that's stood the test of time. *Sonic 2*, *Streets Of Rage II* and *Gunstar Heroes* are just a small selection from the colossal count of 531 known unique European releases. While the number of available titles towered over the Japanese catalogue of just over 400 releases, it was dwarfed by the run in North America, where the platform welcomed over 700 titles. This difference produced a selection of region exclusive releases that failed to make the cut worldwide. Europe in particular missed out on ground-breaking titles such as *Pulseman*, *Twinkle Tale*, *Musha Aleste* and *Golden Axe III*, leaving fans wondering why, as they headed down to the local import shop prepared to pay double.



» Due to the popularity of Sega's console there were plenty of great magazines available for it.



» The Multi-Mega was an interesting combination of the Mega Drive and its Mega-CD add-on. It's now quite rare.



Did you know?

■ In December 1994, the hit TV show *Bad Influence* gave two minutes of prime time to something that could have knocked the stuffing out of Sega's Christmas plans. An all new and unauthorised Mega Drive hardware clone, the Scorpion 16, was demonstrated on air. For just £70, this bootleg device offered compatibility with the existing library of 16-bit titles along with built in functionality to play region locked imports. Somehow, this unofficial kit managed to make its way into a few select high street chains, but not for long. The Scorpion 16 was soon nowhere to be seen and has since become an incredible rarity.

» *Mean Machines* was an awesome magazine, covering plenty of essential Mega Drive releases like *Probotector.*





This broad selection, however, did suffer from a highly contagious infection of sports software – with nearly one quarter of the PAL selection on offer being digital renditions of the playing field, something which could be attributed to Electronic Arts' influence on the 16-bit era. Initially, Mediagenic took control of Sega's request to develop a licenced Joe Montana Football game – however, the team was soon behind schedule. With Sega of America panicking, EA was soon called upon during extra time to pass them a lifeline. Once EA's last minute replacement game touched down, it was an instant hit. Sega of Japan's previous concerns regarding sports games being a poor investment was soon slam dunked. Countless developers caught on to this growing trend, and alongside EA, just about every sport under its glowing stadium lights had its own Mega Drive triumph. The technically impressive *FIFA International Soccer* was undoubtedly the most popular digital football offering; however, these days it has quickly become the least favourite. Its never ending unwanted presence at car boot sales and secondhand shops usually signals that you were just pipped to the post of a more appealing selection.

Although the Mega Drive was officially laid to rest in the late Nineties, the last two decades have seen the system still populate the production line. South America has continued to sell the 16-bit hardware, with distributor Tec Toy targeting those unable to afford modern consoles. During an observant stroll through a South American high street, it's no surprise to see Mega Drive compatible *Guitar Hero* controllers, exclusive ports of more recent games such as *Duke Nukem 3D*, and even brand new releases such as *Férias Frustradas Do Pica-Pau*.

Elsewhere around the world, a handful of developers still consider the Mega Drive a viable platform for new releases. Super Fighter Team, to name just one, recently acquired the rights to translate and re-release a selection of obscure foreign releases. The first of these was a 1996 Chinese exclusive RPG known as *Beggar Prince*, which saw a physical cartridge release in 2006, and further proved that there was still a market for new software on the Mega Drive. Super Fighter Team released a couple more titles after that, but the playing field was then forever changed upon WaterMelon's late arrival. Their heavily delayed atmospheric RPG, *Pier Solar*, took six years to develop and became the largest title in Mega Drive history at 64Mbit. The limited 2010 print run was met with much controversy over a delayed pre-ordering process, leaving many to demand a refund. As the homemade hit now fetches nearly ten times its original cost when placed up for auction, those who abandoned ship early had to hold out for the (also limited) reprint edition.

The Mega Drive has become a popular starting ground for nostalgic gamers, while bringing more than enough challenge to the hardcore collectors. The array of reasonably priced definitive titles and several rarities bordering on the quadruple figure mark at auction, further prove that there's something for everyone with Sega's 16-bit system – as long as you can withstand all the American footballers and soccer superstars.

THE PERIPHERALS



» There was a large number of excellent games available for the Master System, making this device essential if you owned the console.

» There are two versions of the Master System Converter available. This model was designed to work with the Mega Drive II.

Master System Converter

While Hayao Nakayama and Hideki Sato were collaborating to create the Sega Mega Drive, the latter of these two masterminds decided to add a little more sparkle. Sato's forward thinking introduced built-in compatibility for keyboards, mice, floppy disk drives, modems, graphics tablets and even a printer, regardless of whether this additional functionality would ever be used by consumers. But this was just the start of a console desperate to be something more.

Not only did this pre-emptive planning pave the way for the future release of the Sega Mega CD add-on, but it also offered Sega's back catalogue a lifeline. Backwards compatibility with the Sega Master System (or Sega Mark III in Japan) was one of Sato's final additions. However, like the others, it would require additional hardware to work.

Three months after the initial launch of the Sega Mega Drive in Japan, the Power Base Converter (or Mega Adapter as it was known in Japan) was released. This unusually shaped device sat snugly on the top of an original Mega Drive console, covering a good portion of its exterior. At the top of the Power Base Convertor was a small flap that, when exposed, provided access to a Master System cartridge connector, ready for the game of your choice. Below this connector was a small credit card sized slot. While Sega did release their own 16-bit banking software, this card slot wasn't for your life's savings – instead, you could insert Sega's tried and tested media format containing games and software on a flat piece of plastic, the Sega Card (or My Card in Japan). The only other area of interest on the Power Base Converter was the Pause button, a duplicate of the same button found on the 8-bit hardware, and one Sega foolishly didn't wire up to the more accessible start button on the Mega Drive control pad.

How this adapter actually worked, though, is rather interesting. As Sato had already embedded the Master System's central processor (the z80) and sound chip (the SN76489) on the Mega Drive's motherboard, there was little for the Power Base Converter to actually do. Without a single component from the original 8-bit hardware present in the adapter, the Power Base Converter was nothing more than a glorified pass-through-port for Master System games. At ¥4,500 (or £39.95 on its UK release), you might be wondering why such an adapter was necessary. Unfortunately for gamers worldwide, no matter how hard you pushed, the Master System's cartridge pin arrangement was just too dissimilar to that of the Mega Drive's, making the Power Base Converter a mandatory purchase for nostalgic gamers.

When Sega redesigned the Mega Drive in 1993, the perfectly formed Power Base Converter was due a makeover, having become incompatible with the revised hardware. Thus, the Master System Converter II was born. This all new European exclusive adapter – formed for both the Mega Drive I and II – removed the Sega Card slot found on the original device and was more in keeping with the new look.

...AND THE REST



01. Pro Action Replay & Game Genie

■ Born into a culture fuelled by cheat codes and magazine pull-out tips, the Pro Action Replay & Game Genie offered an all new gateway into the world of game hacking. The cartridges, which slotted in-between the console and your game of choice, brought about infinite lives, level skips, one-hit kills and just about anything you could wish for.

02. Arcade Power Stick

■ Further driving home the message that the Sega Mega Drive was well equipped to serve as a coin-op equivalent, a control pad alternative known as the Arcade Power Stick arrived to give you a more authentic grip on the action. The most unusual addition to this peripheral, however, was the inclusion of auto-fire buttons – something arcade purists would likely frown upon.

03. Menacer Light Gun

■ Clearly inspired by Nintendo's release of the Super Scope bazooka, Sega's Menacer light-gun decided to take design one step further than its rival. When fully assembled with its detachable double barrelled scope and shoulder rest, the 16-bit light-gun was far from a worthy investment for reasons other than its sheer ridiculousness.

04. Magic Drive Plus

■ Hailing from the black market, the Magic Drive Plus was the Sega Mega Drive equivalent of the Super Nintendo's Super Wild Card – an unofficial device that could read and write game cartridges onto or from floppy disks. This pirate hardware was much harder to locate than its Super Nintendo counterpart, though it offered just as much functionality – albeit illegally.

05. Magic Key III

■ Throughout the Mega Drive's lifespan developers began devising various methods to prevent games from being imported before their local release date. The Magic Key III, however, rendered all attempts to hold back importers useless, due to its switchable region masking. Games from all over the world could now be played on the console with ease.

06. 4 Way Play

■ Knowing the limitations of the Sega Mega Drive's multiplayer functionality, Electronic Arts created an adapter to bring the party back home. Their 4 Way Play adapter slotted into the two controller ports on the front of the console, expanding the available player slots to four.

07. Justifier

■ While there was already a light-gun available for the Sega Mega Drive, Konami released its own bright digital weapon to accompany their 1993 port of the arcade shooter, *Lethal Enforcers*.

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Sonic The Hedgehog 2

■ Despite having an incredible prequel to live up to, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* smashed all expectations and gave Mario twice as much to worry about.

Streets Of Rage II

■ With all new moves and comrades, the bare knuckle brawlers returned in 1992 to take on the mysterious Mr X – powering themselves up with any discarded meat they might find.



Gunstar Heroes

■ Treasure was clearly a developer capable of getting the most out the Mega Drive. The multiplayer mayhem up for grabs in *Gunstar Heroes* is captivating carnage at its best.

The Revenge Of Shinobi

■ Becoming a ninja-master is no easy feat, something Sega's incredibly hard action platformer *The Revenge Of Shinobi* taught gamers the hard way.

Disney Collection: Castle Of Illusion & Quackshot

■ While it might be cheating to include a compilation here, excluding either of Disney's cartoon capers from a top list would be criminal.



PLAY THESE NEXT



Comix Zone

■ *Comix Zone* is a direct result of Sega's boundary-pushing experimentation – a platformer that dared to think outside the box. Jumping from panel to panel of a once static comic book, Sketch Turner must take on one of the biggest Mega Drive challenges around to the sound of Howard Drossin's timeless soundtrack.



Dynamite Headdy

■ Our protagonist Headdy arrives in North Town amidst the evil puppet King Dark Demon's plans to convert the peaceful town's residents into devilish minions. *Dynamite Headdy*'s adventure isn't easy, but it is laced with cute visuals, a catchy musical background and gameplay to marvel at – something developer Treasure is known for.



Dragon's Fury (aka Devil Crash)

■ *Dragon's Fury* was an incredible interpretation of pinball, offering gamers something physical tables could not. The gothic multi-table affair featured demonic armies of skeletons to target whilst being led through winding passages and warp portals. Real tables were given a run for their money.



ToeJam & Earl

■ Any attempt to summarise the funkatron duo's attempt to escape Earth is destined to crash land. This insane multiplayer funk-'em-up, spanning multiple floors connected by disco lifts, is one of those games you need to experience at least once. You'll either love *ToeJam & Earl* or despise their many attempts to make you laugh.



Road Rash II

■ Not only did the sequel race in with more violence, more crashes and more frustration, but it also introduced nitrous oxide boosts and new weaponry. Whether you preferred to cleanly make your way to the finish line or instead, take out every rival with a chain to the face, *Road Rash II* is one of the finest Mega Drive titles ever released.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Rainbow Islands Extra

■ Despite being a coin-op classic, few decent ports of Taito's 1987 credit gobbler were released. The Mega Drive port, however, lives up to the name despite its default mode introducing questionable robotic enemies.



Golden Axe III

■ Why Sega felt their highly refined finale to the fantasy world hack-and-slash series should never leave Japan is anyone's guess. *Golden Axe III* has since become a rather desirable import.



Monster World IV

■ Stepping aside from its roots, the sixth and final game in the *Wonder Boy/Monster World* series is the incredible story of Asha and her adopted pet Pepe – a 16-bit title not to be missed.

Magical Turbo Hat Flying Adventure

■ Based upon the *Magical Hat* anime series, this bonkers platformer did in fact see a European rehash titled *De-Cap Attack*. The import's untouched charm remains more desirable.

Granada

■ Although many will turn to *Gleylancer* and *Musha Aleste* for their shoot-'em-up fix, *Granada* is quite the hidden gem. WolfTeam's on-land tank freeroamer is often, and unfairly, overlooked.



IMPORT THESE NEXT



Pulseman

■ Although most will remember Game Freak for its work on *Pokémon*, its 1994 Mega Drive offering *Pulseman* is not one you should dismiss too quickly. The energetic platformer centred around a cyber-terrorism battle brings a new dimension to this overcrowded genre, with an electrically-charged challenge to boot.



Gleylancer

■ While at first glance it appears to be nothing more than a glorified *Thunder Force* clone, this scrolling shoot-'em-up sets itself apart thanks to its advanced projectiles system. The command over the Advanced Busterhawk Gleylancer's surrounding satellites puts you in complete control to conquer this scrolling shooter.



Twinkle Tale

■ *Twinkle Tale* was a Japanese exclusive release that fell into the overly popular run-and-gun genre. Stepping aside from the clichéd themes of army-clad jungle shooters usually found in this category, the mystical narrative and magical style introduced a much more diverse array of scenery and a formidable cast of difficult enemies.



Snow Bros

■ Despite being nothing more than a 16-bit port of a winter themed *Bubble Bobble* clone, *Snow Bros* is one of the most addictive co-operative titles on offer. The overly cutesy visuals coupled with the snowball mechanics make fighting for the top score a frequent Friday night occupation – if you can afford to import it.



Yū Yū Hakusho: Makyō Tōitsusen

■ The only title from Treasure's Mega Drive line up that failed to see a European release was this one. The 2D fighter based upon the *Yū Yū Hakusho* anime took inspiration from both *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury*, merging their greatest aspects into a four player free-for-all frenzy.

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

Daze Before Christmas

■ Similar to its Super Nintendo counterpart, the limited shelf life of *Daze Before Christmas* saw this festive release only available during the winter season of 1994.



Fatal Fury 2

■ For reasons we'll probably never know, *Fatal Fury 2* became an Australian rental exclusive title that would fail to see a retail release – aside from the few ex-rental copies that slipped through.



The Death And Return Of Superman

■ Before the days of *World Of Warcraft*, Blizzard Entertainment tried its hand at a *Superman* themed *Streets Of Rage* clone – an awful one that would become a desirable rarity for all the wrong reasons.



The Punisher

■ Capcom arrived all too late to add another side scrolling beat-'em-up to their catalogue, leaving *The Punisher* to sell in small quantities, despite being an enjoyable brawler.



Thunder Force III

■ Believe it or not, *Thunder Force III* was actually distributed in Europe. The US version was sold with an additional German text manual, immortalising this shoot-'em-up as quite the rarity.



GET THESE NEXT



Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Stepping aside from his familiar circus theme, the sequel to *Aero The Acrobat* was nothing more than a new level pack for the disappointing platformer. Having failed to engage gamers previously, the updated release of *Aero The Acrobat 2* also sold in small quantities, making it a future rarity for Mega Drive collectors.



Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety

■ *Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety* from Acclaim was yet another side-scrolling brawler, but it had nothing to offer over its nearest rivals. Considered by fans to have damaged the Marvel name and strayed much too far from the original source material, this title is nothing more than a rarity.



Addams Family Values

■ *Addams Family Values* was the 1995 tie-in to the feature film of the same name. Although Ocean had all the right ideas with its *Zelda*-inspired *Addams Family* RPG, their execution was a little too late. By the time it arrived, gamers had already moved on to the more compelling adventures offered by newer consoles.



Ecco Jr.

■ In an attempt to captivate a younger audience, Sega not only released the Pico hardware, but also a small selection of child-friendly titles. The Australian exclusive, *Ecco Jr.*, removed the difficulty of its predecessors by granting infinite air and energy, leaving kids the menial task of locating hidden fish among other chores.



The Pirates Of Dark Water

■ This short lived animated series produced by Hanna-Barbera was lucky enough to join the plethora of cartoons that spawned their own videogame. Oddly enough its Super Nintendo release was a far superior side scrolling brawler that left its lacklustre Mega Drive platformer counterpart to sink beneath a sea of poor reviews.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

If you're looking for a rare PAL Mega Drive game that feels genuinely unique, this is the item you should seek out for your collection

What makes it so special?

■ In 1992 Sega teamed up with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society to name one of its protected dolphins Ecco. To commemorate the partnership, an oversized *Limited Edition Ecco The Dolphin Box Set* was released, containing a unique T-shirt, shared adoption certificate, audio tape, conservation paraphernalia, and of course, the iconic videogame.



Why is it so expensive?

■ Before the days of DLC, limited editions were strictly limited – and this jewel in the crown is no different. The few remaining sets that have survived the last few decades untouched are genuinely rare, verging on endangered. Consequently, Mega Drive collectors will fight to the final bid on the rare occasions when one of these actually surfaces.

What makes it hard to find?

■ As many hunting this elusive rarity will tell you, you'll be lucky to even see the original packaging, never mind its contents. The incredibly hip *Ecco The Dolphin* T-shirt has since become discarded sleepwear, the blue-tac covered adoption certificate remains nowhere to be seen and the audio cassette tape presumably ended up at the local charity shop.



THE MEGA DRIVE GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN



Altered Beast

- Addams Family Values
- Addams Family, The
- Adventure Of Batman & Robin, The
- Aero The Acro-Bat
- Afterburner II
- Aladdin (Disney's)
- Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle
- Alien 3
- Alien Soldier
- Alien Storm
- Alisia Dragoon
- Altered Beast
- Animaniacs
- Aquatic Games Starring James Pond
- And The Aquabats
- Arrow Flash
- Asterix And The Great Rescue
- Asterix And The Power Of The Gods
- Atomic Runner
- Batman
- Batman Returns
- Battletoads
- Bio Hazard Battle
- Body Count
- Bonanza Bros.
- Bonkers (Disney's)
- Boogerman: A Pick And Flick Adventure
- Bram Stoker's Dracula
- Bubble & Squeak
- Bugs Bunny in Double Trouble
- Burning Force
- Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse
- Castlevania: The New Generation
- Cheese Cat-astrophe Starring Speedy Gonzales
- Chiki Chiki Boys
- Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck
- Columns
- Combat Cars
- Comix Zone
- Cool Spot
- Cosmic Spacehead
- Crüe Ball: Heavy Metal Pinball
- Daffy Duck In Hollywood
- Daze Before Christmas
- Decap Attack
- Demolition Man
- Desert Demolition: Road Runner And Wile E. Coyote
- Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf
- DJ Boy
- Donald in Maui Mallard (Disney's)
- Double Dragon
- Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine
- Dragon Ball Z: L' Appel du Destin
- Dragon's Fury
- Dragons' Revenge
- Dynamite Duke
- Dynamite Headdy
- Earthworm Jim
- Earthworm Jim 2
- Ecco the Dolphin
- Ecco: The Tides Of Time
- Empire Of Steel
- ESWAT: City Under Siege
- Eternal Champions
- Ex-Mutants
- Exo Squad
- Faery Tale Adventure, The
- Fantastic Dizzy
- Fatal Fury
- Fatal Fury 2
- Fatal Labyrinth
- Fatal Rewind
- FIFA International Soccer
- Flashback
- Flicky
- (Mis)Adventures Of Flink, The
- Flintstones, The
- Forgotten Worlds
- Gain Ground
- Galaxy Force II
- Gauntlet IV
- General Chaos
- Ghostbusters
- Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- Global Gladiators
- Golden Axe
- Golden Axe II
- Gunstar Heroes
- Gynoug
- Havoc
- Hellfire
- Herzog Zwei
- Hook
- International Sensible Soccer
- International Superstar Soccer Deluxe
- James Bond 007: The Duel
- James Pond II: Codename Robocod
- Jewel Master
- Jungle Book, The (Disney's)
- Jungle Strike: The Sequel To Desert Strike
- Jurassic Park
- Jurassic Park: Rampage Edition
- Kid Chameleon
- Krusty's Super Fun House
- Landstalker: The Treasures Of King Nole
- Last Battle
- Legend Of Galahad, The
- Lethal Enforcers
- Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters



The Punisher

- Light Crusader
- Lion King, The (Disney's)
- Lost World: Jurassic Park, The
- Lotus II: R.E.C.S
- Man Overboard!
- Marko's Magic Football
- Marsupilami
- Mazin Wars
- Mega Bomberman
- Mega Man: The Wily Wars
- Mega Turrican
- Mercs
- Michael Jackson's Moonwalker
- Mickey Mania
- Micro Machines
- Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament
- Might and Magic: Gates to Another World
- Mighty Morphin Power Rangers
- Mortal Kombat
- Mortal Kombat II
- Mr. Nutz
- Mutant League Football
- Mutant League Hockey
- Mystic Defender
- Normy's Beach Babe-O-Rama
- Onslaught
- Ooze, The
- OutRun
- Pac-Mania
- Paperboy
- Phantasy Star II
- Phantasy Star III: Generations Of Doom
- Phantasy Star IV
- Phelios
- Pink Goes To Hollywood
- Pinocchio (Disney's)
- Pirates of Dark Water, The
- Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
- Power Drive
- Probotector
- Psycho Pinball
- Puggsy
- Punisher, The
- QuackShot Starring Donald Duck
- Rambo III
- Ranger X
- Ren & Stimpy Show Presents: Stimpy's Invention, The
- Revenge Of Shinobi, The

EXTREMELY RARE	VERY RARE	RARE	UNCOMMON	COMMON	VERY COMMON
Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.	Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.	You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.	You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.	Always just a click away for the average collector.	So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.



Strider

- Risky Woods
- Ristar
- Road Rash
- Road Rash II
- Road Rash 3
- RoboCop Versus The Terminator
- Rock 'N Roll Racing
- Rocket Knight Adventures
- Rolling Thunder 2
- Rolo To The Rescue
- Saturday Night Slam Masters
- Sensible Soccer: European Champions
- Shadow Dancer: The Secret Of Shinobi
- Shadow Of The Beast II
- Shining Force
- Shining Force II
- Shining In The Darkness
- Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master
- Side Pocket
- Simpsons, The: Bart's Nightmare
- Skeleton Krew
- Skitchin'
- Smurfs, The: Travel The World
- Snake Rattle 'n Roll
- Soleil
- Sonic & Knuckles
- Sonic 3D Flickies' Island
- Sonic Spinball
- Sonic The Hedgehog
- Sonic The Hedgehog 2
- Sonic The Hedgehog 3
- Space Harrier II
- Sparkster
- Speedball 2
- Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage
- Spider-Man Vs. The Kingpin
- Splatterhouse 2
- Spot Goes To Hollywood
- Story Of Thor, The
- Street Racer
- Streets Of Rage
- Streets Of Rage II
- Streets Of Rage 3
- Strider
- Sunset Riders
- Super Fantasy Zone
- Super Hang-On
- Super Hydlide
- Super Skidmarks
- Super Smash T.V.
- Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers
- Super Thunder Blade V
- Superman: The Man Of Steel
- Sword Of Vermillion
- Sylvester & Tweety in Cagey Capers
- T2: The Arcade Game
- TaleSpin (Disney's)
- Taz-Mania
- Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: The Hyperstone Heist
- Terminator 2: Judgment Day
- Terminator, The
- Thunder Force II
- Thunder Force III
- Thunder Force IV
- Time Killers
- TinTin In Tibet
- Tiny Toon Adventures: ACME All-Stars
- Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Hidden Treasure
- ToeJam & Earl
- ToeJam & Earl In Panic On Funkotron
- Toki: Going Ape Spit
- Toy Story (Disney's)
- Treasure Land Adventure, McDonald's
- True Lies
- Truxton
- Turrican
- Twin Hawk
- Two Crude Dudes
- Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3
- Universal Soldier
- Urban Strike: The Sequel To Jungle Strike
- Vectorman
- Virtua Racing
- Virtual Bart
- Wiz 'n' Liz: The Frantic Wabbit Wescue
- Wolverine: Adamantium Rage
- Wonder Boy III: Monster Lair
- Wonder Boy In Monster World
- World Of Illusion Starring
- Mickey Mouse & Donald Duck
- X-Men 2: Clone Wars
- Zero The Kamikaze Squirrel
- Zero Wing
- Zombies
- Zool: Ninja Of The "Nth" Dimension



Virtual Bart

Collector Q&A

We speak to Stewart Greenwood about his impressive collection.



So what drew you to collecting Sega Mega Drive games and hardware?
I was in a game store looking for a new PS2 game one day and couldn't find anything, when I noticed some really cheap used Mega Drive games, a few of which I remembered wanting when I was a kid. I still had my Mega Drive so I thought 'what the hell', bought them and never looked back!

What does the Mega Drive offer?
It's the arcade feel of the games, they're very atmospheric and the music is always fast and action packed. Mix in a big bag of nostalgia and I'm a happy chap.

How long have you been collecting for?
I'm unsure about this, but at some point in the early Noughties my games stopped just being games that I had accumulated over the years and turned into a serious collection. I'm not sure why either, I don't actually remember deciding that I wanted to collect games, it just kind of happened!

So what, if anything, has eluded you?
A Pioneer CLD A100 LaserActive. I've wanted one for many years now so I could play the Mega LD games but have never had the money available when a decent one has come up for sale. I will get one eventually...

Which one item in your collection could you not live without and why?
Streets Of Rage II, I love that game and although I have it on my phone and PS3 I would never get rid of my original copy that I've had since I was a kid.

What is the most you have spent on a single Mega Drive item and why?
£751 on a blue box copy of *World Championship Soccer 2*, which is a crazy amount to spend on a box I agree, but I needed to have it, I just wasn't happy owning the classics re-release version of the game!

How does your other half feel about your impressive collection?
She quite likes the fact that I have something I am so interested in to keep me busy, but gets annoyed when little piles of games start appearing all over the place!

What advice would you give other readers interested in collecting Mega Drive games?
Do it! It's a great console with so many fun games available for it, and for the most part games are really cheap too. The only real advice I'd give is to buy a Japanese or modified console so you don't exclude yourself from the great imports available.

If you could go back and purchase a single game upon its release, which would it be and why?
Lakers Vs Celtics And The NBA Play Offs. The only PAL Mega Drive game I need a box for, although I'm not sure it actually had a proper release!



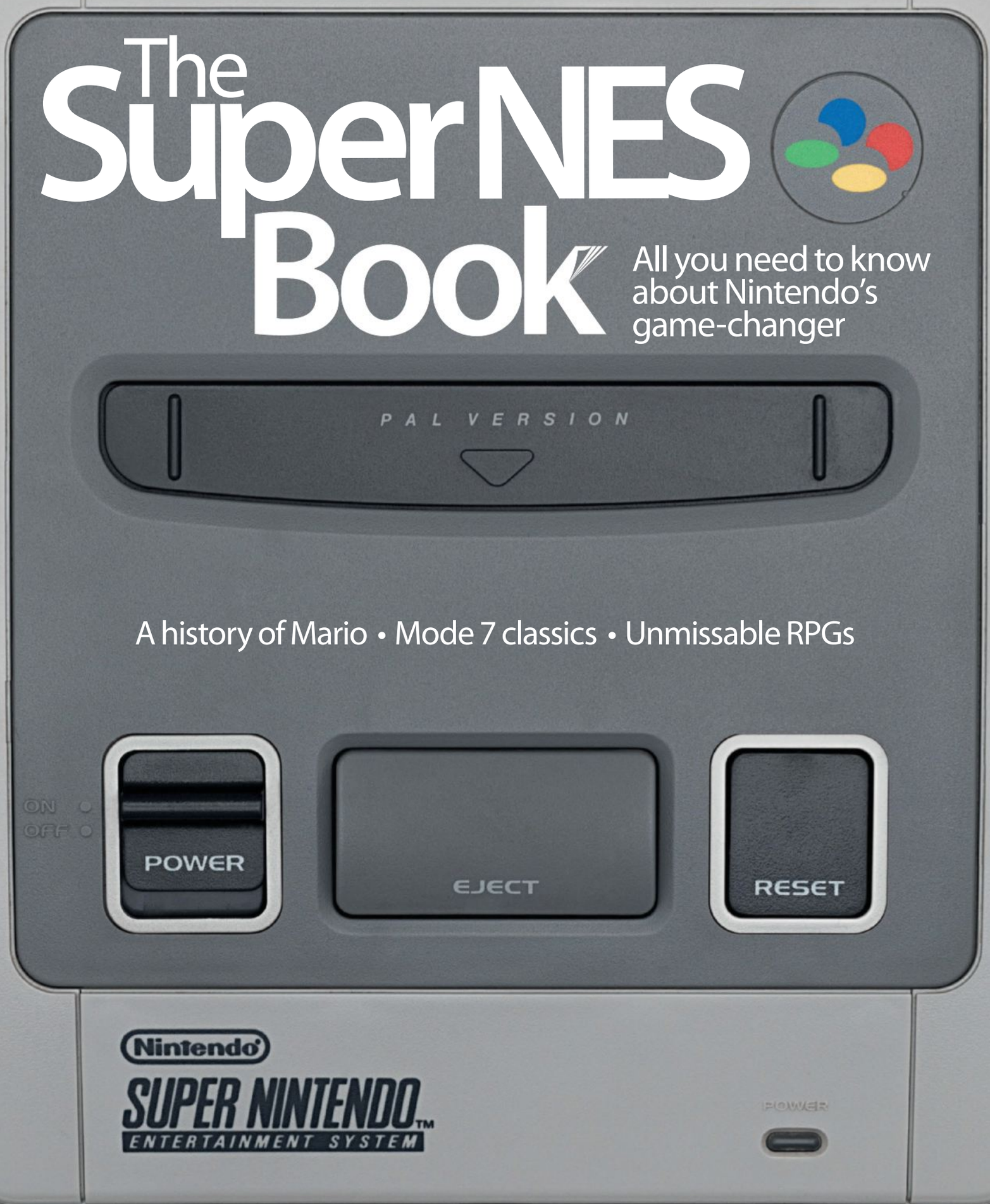
* Rarity guide courtesy of RetroCollect More information at www.retrocollect.com. Sega Genesis courtesy of Gaz Backhouse


The Mega Drive Book
The Mega Drive Book


The Super NES Book

The SuperNES Book

All you need to know about Nintendo's game-changer



A history of Mario • Mode 7 classics • Unmissable RPGs

Welcome to

The Super NES Book

Nintendo had its work cut out with the release of its Super NES. While it had dominated the 8-bit generation with its NES, Sega already had a 14-month head start with its own 16-bit console, and a host of arcade exclusives from Sega and many third-party publishers. Nintendo fought back in fine style and while the fight was far closer than the previous generation, the Super NES eventually pulled ahead as both consoles reached the end of their commercial lives. Assisted by its fabled use of Mode 7 and hits such as Super Mario World, Secret Of Mana, Street Fighter 2 and Axelay, Nintendo's machine won over the public and it remains an essential console for any collector, delivering a diverse range of games that few other systems of the time could hope to match. With that in mind we've taken this opportunity to celebrate some of the console's finest games. So take a comfy seat, cast your mind back and bask in the brilliance of the Super NES.



In association with retro GAMER magazine

The Super NES Book

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Website: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
Twitter: @Books_Imagine
Facebook: www.facebook.com/ImagineBookazines

Head of Publishing
Aaron Asadi

Head of Design
Ross Andrews

Editor
Darran Jones

Senior Art Editor
Greg Whitaker

Design
Perry Wardell-Wicks

Photographer
James Sheppard

Printed by
William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

Distributed in the UK & Eire by
Imagine Publishing Ltd, www.imagineshop.co.uk. Tel 01202 586200

Distributed in Australia by
Gordon & Gotch, Equinox Centre, 18 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest,
NSW 2086. Tel + 61 2 9972 8800

Distributed in the Rest of the World by
Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU

Disclaimer
The publisher cannot accept responsibility for any unsolicited material lost or damaged in the post. All text and layout is the copyright of Imagine Publishing Ltd. Nothing in this bookazine may be reproduced in whole or part without the written permission of the publisher. All copyrights are recognised and used specifically for the purpose of criticism and review. Although the bookazine has endeavoured to ensure all information is correct at time of print, prices and availability may change. This bookazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

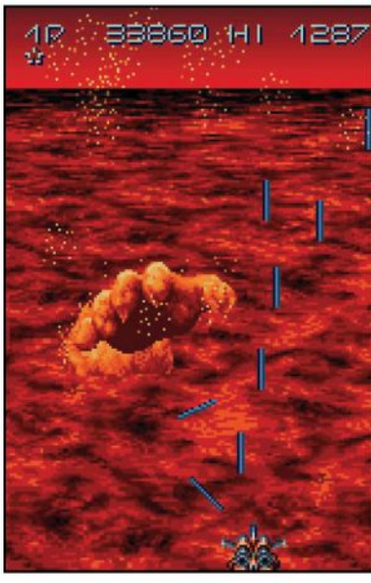
The Super NES Book © 2013 Imagine Publishing Ltd

ISBN 978-1909758056

IMAGINE PUBLISHING





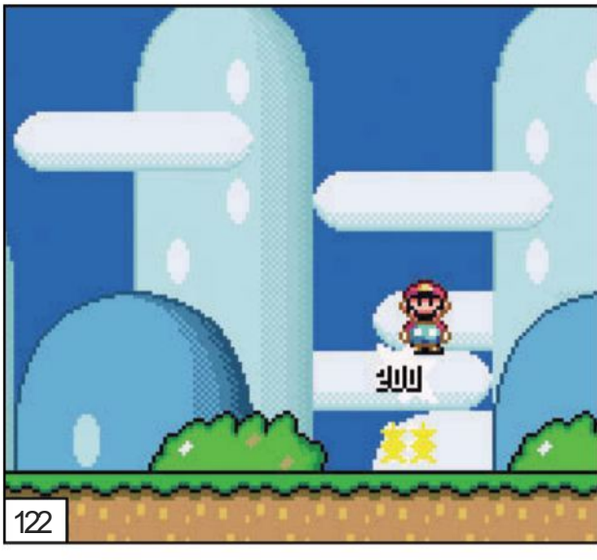


The Super NES Book Contents









OVER 20 YEARS OF CLASSIC GAMING

114 RETROINSPECTION: SUPER NINTENDO
The Super NES was Nintendo's answer to its world-conquering NES. Discover how it created a 16-bit masterpiece

118 PERFECT TEN: SUPER NINTENDO
There's a fantastic array of games on Nintendo's 16-bit machine, but you won't go far wrong if you pick these beauties

120 AND THE REST: SUPER NINTENDO
Brush off those rose-tinted spectacles as we look at some of the best and worst found on Nintendo's classy console

122 MR VIDEOGAME: THE STORY OF MARIO
Discover how Mario, the star of the Super Nintendo's best platformer, has constantly pushed the genre's boundaries

132 RETRO REVIVAL: SUPER STREET FIGHTER II TURBO
Flex your fingers and get ready to play one of the best one-on-one fighters for Nintendo's console

134 THE MAKING OF SUPER METROID
Yoshio Sakamoto explains how he turned Samus Arun's 16-bit adventure into the best Metroid game of all time

140 CLASSIC GAME: CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS
We explain why Konami's hectic run-'n'-gun remains one of the best examples of the genre some 21 years later

142 MODE 7 HEAVEN
We reveal the greatest games that benefitted from the Super Nintendo's groundbreaking graphics mode. How many of these classic have you been impressed by?

148 IMPORT ONLY: RENDERING RANGER
Discover the excellent things about this extremely rare Turrican clone that has made it a must own for serious collectors. Just make sure you have a deep wallet...

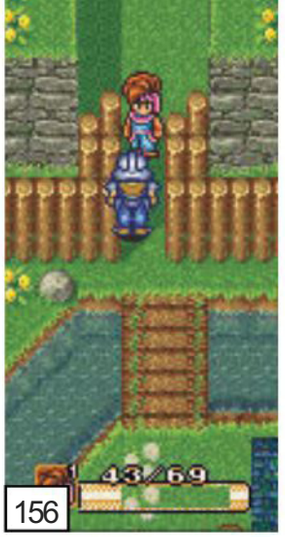
150 THE ULTIMATE GUIDE: AXELAY
Everything you need to know about Konami's exhilarating shoot-'em-up and why it remains in a league of its own

156 RPG HEAVEN: THE BEST SUPER NINTENDO RPGS
Nintendo's console was famed for its fantastic RPGs, and many of them are still revered as timeless classics. Join us as we unveil the essential adventures you don't want to miss







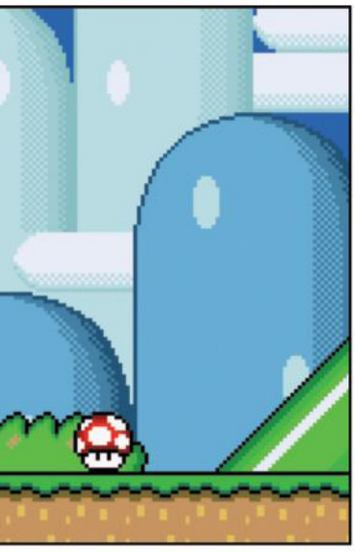




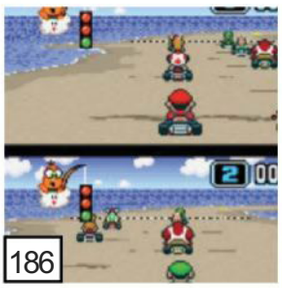
















162 CLASSIC GAME: THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

Find out the weird and wacky reasons that helped make Konami's Goemon game so unmissable

164 THE MAKING OF: SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

We reveal the story behind Mario's last ever SNES game and Squaresoft's last release for the 16-bit system

168 RETRO REVIVAL: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Why you need to return to the realm of Hyrule and replay Link's greatest 2D adventure

170 WHY YOU MUST PLAY: ACTRAISER

Part hack-and-slash, part life sim, all brilliant. Quintet's SNES game remains an incredible gaming experience that you won't want to miss

174 IMPORT ONLY: UMIHARA KAWASE

Girls, frogs and fish sounds like an odd combination, but this endearing physics-based platformer remains amazing fun

176 THE MAKING OF HARVEST MOON

Discover how Yasuhiro Wada created his intriguing farming simulator for Nintendo's 16-bit console

180 THE ULTIMATE GUIDE: U.N. SQUADRON

The classic Capcom arcade shooter that was turned into one of the Super Nintendo's greatest shoot-'em-ups

186 RETRO REVIVAL: SUPER MARIO KART

How Mario gave up the day job of plumbing and rescuing princesses to kick-start a brand-new genre

188 THE MAKING OF: SUPER STAR WARS TRILOGY

How LucasArts' seminal sci-fi space opera was turned into a series of must-own SNES games

194 TOP 25 SUPER NINTENDO GAMES

Retro Gamer readers reveal their favourite games for Nintendo's 16-bit console. How many have you played?

200 COLLECTOR'S GUIDE: SUPER NINTENDO

Want to collect for the SNES? Then this fantastic guide will reveal the best games and peripherals to keep an eye out for



Year Released: Japan: 1990 USA: 1991 UK: 1992

Original Price: Japan: 25,000 Yen USA: $199 UK: £149.99 (INCLUDING SUPER MARIO WORLD)

Buy it now for: £25+ ($40+)

Associated Magazines: Nintendo Magazine System, Superplay, Total, N-Force, SNES Force

Why the SNES was great… Nintendo's 16 bit powerhouse represents the true "Golden Age" of videogaming as the likes of Konami, Squaresoft and even Nintendo itself have arguably never been on better form than when designing games for this machine. The best SNES releases featured both flawless gameplay and graphics and set a high benchmark for quality entertainment software that, in many cases, endures to this day.



SNES

BY RELEASING THE SUPER NES A YEAR LATER THAN ITS NEAREST RIVALS, NINTENDO FACED THE DAUNTING TASK OF CONVERTING A GENERATION OF GAMERS TO ITS NEW CONSOLE. IT COULD HAVE GONE HORRIBLY WRONG BUT, AS **RETRO GAMER** REVEALS, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE IF YOU HAVE THE BEST GAMES

With a NES in thirty per cent of American homes and the word 'Famicom' synonymous with videogames in Japan, Nintendo was understandably reluctant to release a successor to its best selling console and chose to support the ageing 8-bit console for as long as it could. It was, however, only a matter of time before the advance of technology allowed Nintendo's competition to take the lead and by 1988 both NEC's PC Engine and Sega's Mega Drive offered a far more powerful entertainment experience. Nintendo could no longer rest on its laurels and secretly began work on its next 'Family Computer': the Super Famicom.

The 16-bit-system had been developed and designed by Masayuki Uemura, who had spent months attempting to make the Super Famicom backwards compatible with Famicom cartridges but had found that the massive leap in technology had set Nintendo's machine so far in advance of its predecessor that building in Famicom compatibility would have been far too costly. Without backwards compatibility to bridge the transition between consoles, Nintendo would need an irresistible launch line-up to tempt existing Famicom owners to upgrade. Knowing this, Nintendo's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi needed his best man on the job and, as soon as development of *Super Mario Bros 3* was complete, he charged Shigeru Miyamoto and his thirty-man team with the task of exploring the new hardware's game-playing capabilities.

One of the biggest tricks that the hardware had up its sleeve was the now infamous Mode 7: a graphical hardware mode that allowed sprites to zoom in and out and rotate in a way that simulated a 3D depth-of-field effect. Neither the Mega Dive nor PC Engine was

To CD or not CD.
Wishing to exploit the advantages of the growing CD-ROM medium, Nintendo had planned a SNES CD-ROM drive from as early as 1988 and had courted both Sony and Phillips with the proposal. The fruits of those early endeavours were a series of Nintendo licensed games for the Phillips CDI and a prototype add-on from Sony that was eventually developed into the PlayStation we know today. If Nintendo had not backed out of the SNES/PlayStation partnership then the videogame landscape would be unrecognisable and this RetroInspection might tell the tale of a very different console. It is unclear how many games were in development for the SNES-CD but we do know that *Secret Of Mana* was originally CD-based with a planned branching story. The game had to be dramatically cut back to fit on cartridge: a process that was instrumental in convincing Squaresoft to move *Final Fantasy VII* from N64 to PlayStation.



» [SNES] *Secret Of Mana* started off as a CD title, complete with branching storylines.







» The Japanese packaging evoked a playful image that was missing from the mature design of the console.



» The SNES Jr made it to the USA but its rarity makes it much easier to find the Japanese version.

capable of sprite scaling on such a level so Nintendo decided that the first three Super Famicom games would take advantage of the innovative feature. After 15 solid months of R&D, Miyamoto and Co would begin work on *F-Zero*, *Pilotwings* and *Super Mario Bros 4*, which would all use Mode 7 to varying degrees. However, with only ten months until launch day, the team was only able to complete two of the games on time and *Pilotwings* (the most technically demanding of the three) slipped by a month.

By 20 November 1990, Japanese demand for Nintendo's new console had reached fever-pitch and any worries that the machine would fail to entice existing Famicom owners were washed away. Demand for the console was so high that, for example, the Hankyu department store in Osaka had to stop taking preorders only a week after they started. In retrospect the release of the Super Famicom heralded the age of hysteria that has defined every hardware launch to this day. By 20 November, total pre-orders numbered in excess of 1.5 million yet only 300,000 machines shipped. Fearing that several Yakuza groups planned to hijack the Super Famicom shipment, to sell on at artificially inflated prices, Nintendo commenced 'Operation Midnight Shipping' in which the entire batch of 300,000 machines were hauled across Japan in the very early hours of the 20th. Thanks to these dramatic efforts, the launch was a rousing success: the Super Famicom sold out in seconds, even with only two launch titles. Yet when one of those titles was the sequel to the best selling game of all time, success was a certainty. Despite being the least technically demanding of the Super Famicom's launch titles it was *Super Mario Bros 4: Super Mario World* that shifted the machine. *Super Mario World* expanded on its predecessors by offering finely tuned platforming gameplay, beautiful pastel graphics and a staggering 79 levels. The game is still remembered, 16 years on, as the best 2D platform game of all time so it is no surprise that Nintendo relied on it to push sales of their console.

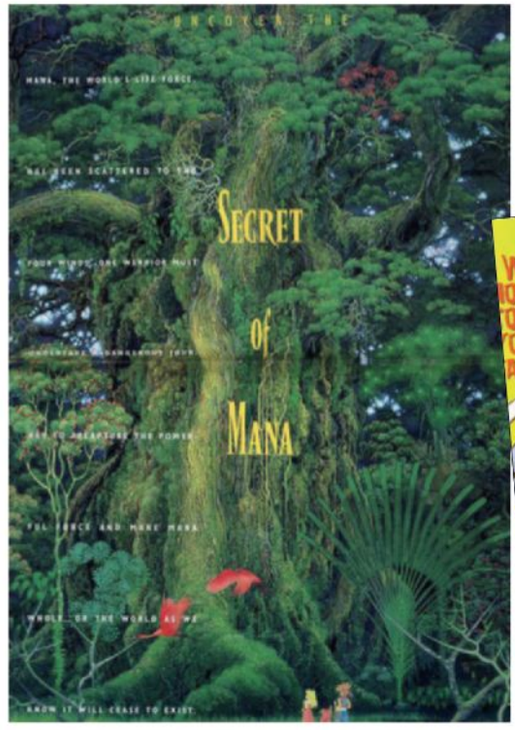
When it came time to introduce the renamed Super Nintendo Entertainment System to the UK (a typical 17 months after the Japanese release) Nintendo made the bold decision to bundle *Super Mario World* with every SNES console. Making for one of the best freebies of all time, *Mario* helped to move many a SNES into British living rooms that summer, but arriving two years after the Mega Drive proved very costly. Sega's black beauty was phenomenally popular in Europe (thanks to its exclusive sports simulations and arcade conversions) and left little room for competition. It wasn't until Christmas of 1992 that the tide truly began to turn, thanks to Capcom's *Street Fighter II*. The original arcade game had spawned a worldwide craze, the likes of which had not been seen since the days of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, and whichever home console netted a conversion first would benefit from a serious rise in sales. Sure enough, Nintendo managed to snag Capcom's seminal brawler a full year before Sega and stole a significant slice of the UK market in the process. A pattern



» [SNES] *Super Castlevania* was yet another fantastic release from Konami e of the last games to be released for the Super Famicom in 1999.



» [SNES] *Donkey Kong Country* used Rare's "Advanced Computer Modelling" to create previously inconceivable visuals on the ageing SNES.



» An enigmatic 2-page advert for *Secret Of Mana* that bravely chose not to use screenshots.

» **Right:** The Super Game Boy allowed GB games to be played on a TV set and expanded the SNES library by thousands. **Right:** An advert for the surprisingly decent SNES conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*.













» **Top Left and right:** By tying the release of *Super Mario World* to the SNES Nintendo ensure great success for their new console. The "Mode 7" effects in *F-Zero* really showed off the power of the Super Nintendo. **Bottom left and right:** *Star Fox* (renamed *Star Wing* in the UK) used extra hardware to push the SNES beyond its limitations. By arriving so late in the console's life, *Yoshi's Island* went tragically unnoticed



A Room with a Satellaview

The Satellaview has such an unusual history that we could fill a RetroInspection on this intriguing add-on alone. The device allowed the Super Famicom to acquire games from St Giga: a popular Japanese satellite service. At prescheduled times the service would broadcast a chosen game which could then be downloaded onto a flash cart and played "offline". The service was discontinued in 2000 but it is still possible to find flash carts with games saved to them. These extreme rarities should be of particular interest to Nintendo fans as the service featured exclusive versions of classic Nintendo games including *Zelda*, *Famicom Wars*, *Fire Emblem* and *Excitebike*. There was even a text based sequel to *Chrono Trigger* (known as *Radical Dreamers*) and some games, like the satellite version of *A Link To The Past*, could only be played at certain times of day because the Satellaview broadcast live voice-acting into the game.

was starting to form: although Sega's success was assured by its in-house conversions and its relationship with EA, it was Nintendo's SNES that turned the most heads by continually providing the classiest most desirable games. It started with *Mario* and *Street Fighter* and continued through *Zelda*, *Secret Of Mana*, *Axelay*, *Super Mario Kart* and hundreds of other top-drawer games that would go on to steal the hearts of hardcore and casual gamers alike.

As the years went by and more powerful competitors (like the 3DO and Jaguar) fell by the wayside the SNES' excellent range of software continued to impress with the aid of Nintendo's quality control and, when it became apparent that the console was beginning to show its age, Nintendo built partnerships with third-party developers to find new ways of making their games look next generation even if the original hardware wasn't. The first of these partnerships came about when the UK's Argonaut Software impressed Nintendo by programming the monochrome Game Boy to display full 3D graphics. On the strength of the Game Boy title, two of Argonaut's employees, Giles Goddard and Dylan Cuthbert, achieved what few British coders have and secured positions at Nintendo's Kyoto headquarters. There they developed the "Mario Chip" (later renamed Super FX) a cartridge embedded co-processor that would allow the SNES to display true 3D polygonal visuals for the first time. The first Super FX game they created, with the legendary design talents of Shigeru Miyamoto, was *Star Fox*: an astounding 3D space combat game that wowed SNES owners of 1993, who couldn't believe the console was capable of such graphics. The following year another incredibly talented UK software house found a way to push the SNES beyond its preconceived limits. Rare, who had previously pushed the ZX Spectrum much further than anyone thought possible, had been using Silicon Graphics workstations to test concepts for Nintendo's next console: the Ultra 64. In doing so they discovered a way of using high quality pre-rendered graphics on the humble SNES, which they used to create the beautiful *Donkey Kong Country* and an arcade conversion of the previously Ultra 64 bound *Killer Instinct*. With the PlayStation and the Saturn on the horizon the startling looks of Rare and Argonaut's games must have made the SNES a very tempting reason to not upgrade.

Nintendo's luck couldn't last forever though and, despite pushing the hardware to its limits, sales of the SNES slowed to a trickle in the UK – due in no small part to the globe-consuming success of the PlayStation. Nevertheless, like all good consoles, the SNES was due a last hurrah and got it in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. The gorgeous platform game used a combination of Mode 7 and the Super FX2 chip to pump out some of the best effects the SNES had ever seen and with the classic Nintendo gameplay it became one of the console's most loved titles. The gloriously beautiful platform game proved that the Super Nintendo was far from dead but was sadly lost in the excitement of the new era of 3D games and the hype surrounding *Super Mario 64*. Though it attained outstanding critical acclaim, *Yoshi's Island* was a commercial flop in the UK and was one of the last significant SNES titles to see a European release alongside *Donkey Kong Country 3* and *Street Fighter Alpha 2* in December 1996.

As is typical of Japanese consoles, the native Super Famicom lived on much longer than the Western SNES thanks to continued hardware support and a greater demand for software. The Satellaview (see boxout) broadcasted new Super Famicom games directly into players' homes from 1995 to 2000 and, in doing so, kept the large user base active. A new hardware model was introduced in 1998: the Super Famicom Jr was a smaller, sleeker unit that was affordably priced as an alternative to the N64 and allegedly small enough to be sold in street vending machines. Top quality games continued to be released until 2000 with *Fire Emblem: Thracia 776* and a series of *Picross* titles being the most noteworthy.

Production of the Super Famicom finally ceased in late 2003, which may seem like a good innings until you consider that production of the original Famicom was discontinued in the same year. Regardless, throughout its thirteen-year lifespan, the SNES/Super Famicom achieved widespread success and adoration thanks to Nintendo's willingness to keep the machine alive through groundbreaking hardware expansions and a virtually limitless string of superb releases.



» Hiroshi Yamauchi was the head of Nintendo for 53 years and was instrumental to its early success.



SNES



PERFECT TEN GAMES

There is a fantastic, diverse range of great games available on the Super Nintendo, which makes putting any selection of games together a near thankless task. We'll happily do it though, as we love Nintendo's 16-bit console. So without further ado, here's our essential choices that deserve to be in every Super Nintendo owner's collection. If you don't own them, you clearly don't love Nintendo's console as much as we do



01



02



03



04

SUPER MARIO KART

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO BROS

01 We've been playing the original *Super Mario Kart* on and off now for a staggering 20 years and it still remains fresher than a baker's dozen that's just popped out the oven. Meticulously designed circuits, a well-balanced range of weapons – including the greatly missed feather – and impressive visuals proved perfectly that there was so much more to everyone's favourite plumber than simply jumping on wayward Koopas. While the cups provided plenty of fun, it was the stunning time trial mode and sublime multi-player games that kept us constantly going back for just one more go. Thank god **Retro Gamer** wasn't around at the time of *Mario Kart*'s release; we'd have never got the damned magazine finished on time!

SUPER METROID

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BADVANCE WARS DS

02 *Super Metroid* is a game that works on a variety of levels. While some marvelled at its motherly themes, stunningly created environments and remarkable attention to detail, others were simply impressed with the sheer amount of crap you could blow up in it. Regardless of how you feel about Samus's only 16-bit adventure, there's no denying that *Super Metroid* remains a staggering achievement that perfectly combines the rush of shooting huge bosses with the wonder of exploring vast new areas like no other SNES game around. Little wonder then that it took Nintendo eight years to come up with a sequel that could do it justice.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME

03 There's no denying the superiority of *Ocarina Of Time*, but *A Link To The Past* remains a wonderfully accomplished adventure that deserves to sit proudly in every SNES owner's collection. Every dungeon you explore is crafted to perfection, and while they start off easy, you'll soon be scratching your head over Miyamoto's deviously designed puzzles. The many weapons you discover are well balanced and every encountered boss is a masterstroke in design. Then of course you have the two unique worlds that Link can eventually switch between, thus making an already sprawling game even larger. Quite simply one of the finest 16-bit adventures ever made.

CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

04 Konami released some outstanding titles for Nintendo's 16-bit wonder, but this cracking effort from 1992 is arguably one of its best efforts.

Each level is a rollercoaster ride of destruction and featured the SNES hardware on fine form. Sprites are full of detail, the game's many bosses a joy to behold, and there's a ridiculous amount of Mode 7 trickery going on. Add in a fantastic, stomping soundtrack, an awesome array of different weapons and some groovy overhead levels (that can be rotated with the left and right triggers) and you have a run-and-gun title that would be essential on any format.

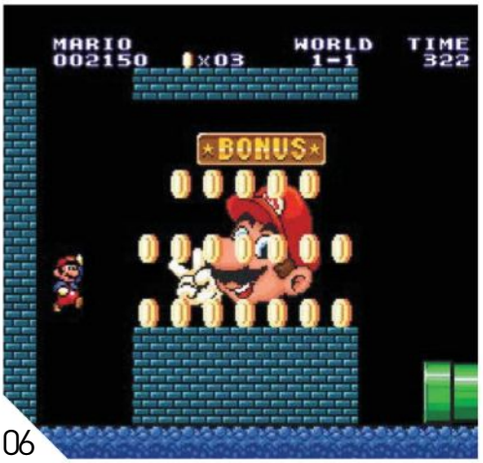
AXELAY

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** KONAMI
- **CREATED BY:** KONAMI
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRADIUS III

05 There's a host of great shooters available for the SNES, but few can compare to the brilliance that is Konami's stunning *Axelay*. From its quasi-3D levels to its utterly amazing music, every moment of *Axelay* is exhilarating to play through. While the level design and available weapons are worthy of praise, it's the immense, striking bosses the game constantly throws at you that truly astound. Huge metallic spiders, colossal ED-209 styled mechs and a gigantic lava creature are just a few of the mayors you have to deal with and each is breath-taking to behold. Why's it's never been released on the GBA we'll never know…



05



06



07



08



09



10

SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

06 What's better than three classic *Mario* NES outings on one cartridge? Why, three *Mario* NES games with improved aesthetics and a fourth exclusive title that had only originally appeared in Japan of course!

All-Stars' triple whammy of *Super Mario Bros 1*, *2* and *3* made it incredible value for money and were great examples of taking old games and updating them for a newer platform. Add in *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, which was effectively a tougher version of the original game and allowed you to choose from either brother and you had an amazingly comprehensive package. Finally, if you bought the version that came boxed with a SNES you received *Super Mario World* on the cartridge. Bargain!

CHRONO TRIGGER

- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **PUBLISHED BY:** SQUARESOFT
- **CREATED BY:** SQUARESOFT
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FINAL FANTASY X

07 It would have been all too easy to go with Squaresoft's *Secret Of Mana*, so we've decided to focus on this little beauty instead.

While Squaresoft's epic RPG borrows plenty of ideas from the *Final Fantasy* series, you just can't help but be impressed by the sheer amount of love that has gone into crafting this astonishing RPG. Although the central storyline is fairly predictable, it soon begins to twist and turn all over the place and introduces plenty of memorable characters and sub plots. The combat system is a joy to use and the use of sound throughout is outstanding. It all combines to create one of the most engrossing RPGs we've ever played. Utterly essential.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA II

- **RELEASED:** 1996
- **PUBLISHED BY:** CAPCOM
- **CREATED BY:** CAPCOM
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

08 Capcom's second *Alpha* title was released late in the SNES's life, and as a result, was sadly overlooked by a great many gamers who had moved on to the newer, flashier consoles.

Their loss was our gain however, as it's easily one the best brawlers on Nintendo's 16-bit wonder. Great looking sprites, a solid roster of characters, new moves, plenty of additional animation and thumping good gameplay made *Alpha II* a winner. We've no idea why the first game didn't appear on the SNES, but Capcom more than made up for it with this excellent sequel. An outstanding fighter that deserves to be in everyone's SNES collection.

PILOTWINGS

- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NINTENDO
- **CREATED BY:** NINTENDO
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DONKEY KONG

09 The Mode 7 chip was used in countless numbers of SNES games, but never was its appearance more noticeable than in the wondrous *Pilotwings*.

Taking control of a budding pilot, all the game required you to do was master licences for four different events: Skydiving, Rocketbelt, Light Plane and Hang Glider. While some of *Pilotwings*' events could be tricky to get to grips with, the elation you felt when they were finally mastered more than made up for it. Thanks to the excellent Mode 7 effects the sense of scale you encountered as you flew through the air was breath-taking, and wait until you finally get to use the hang glider… Marvellous.

UMIHARA KAWASE

- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHED BY:** NHK
- **CREATED BY:** TNN
- **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** SHIJOU SAIKYOU LEAGUE SERIE A: ACE STRIKER

10 It seems only fair to put at least one quirky Japanese title in the top ten, so our vote goes to the delightful *Umihara Kawase*.

Taking control of an adorably cute little girl, the aim of each stage is simple – avoid the bizarre fishy enemies and reach the door on each exit. Of course, said exit is often out of reach, and with your little tyke not being that great a jumper she has to rely on a handy elastic rope to get her around. Think *Bionic Commando* but with some decent rope physics thrown into the mix and you have a good idea of what to expect.



SNES and the rest...

Nintendo's 16-bit console was an absolute powerhouse of a machine and supported an amazing array of different genres. From hit arcade conversions to the incredibly obscure, the SNES had something for everyone

01 ACTRAISER
02 SUPER GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS
03 THE FIREMEN
04 KILLER INSTINCT
05 DONALD DUCK
06 SUPER BOMBERMAN
07 THE ADVENTURES OF BATMAN & ROBIN
08 MAGIC SWORD
09 CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WAR
10 GANBARE GOEMON 2
11 SHADOWRUN
12 TERRANIGMA
13 MEGA MAN X
14 CANNON FODDER
15 SUPER METROID
16 POCKY & ROCKY
17 DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
18 JOE & MAC
19 PILOTWINGS
20 TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN
21 SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS
22 ALADDIN
23 BREATH OF FIRE
24 GOKUJOU PARODIUS
25 STUNT RACE FX
26 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER
27 SIM CITY
28 STARWING
29 FIRST SAMURAI
30 ARKANOID: DOH IT AGAIN
31 BLACK THORNE
32 PRINCE OF PERSIA
33 CACOMA KNIGHT
34 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: TURBO 'HYPER FIGHTING
35 THE ADDAMS FAMILY
36 FINAL FIGHT GUY
37 MICKY MANIA
38 SUPER MARIO WORLD
39 CYBERNATOR
40 LEMMINGS
41 ACTRAISER
42 BATTLETOADS & DOUBLE DRAGON: THE ULTIMATE TEAM
43 THE CHAOS ENGINE
44 MR DO!
45 SECRET OF MANA
46 SUPER SMASH TV
47 DARIUS TWIN
48 SUPER TENNIS
49 UNIRALLY
50 ASTERIX & OBELIX
51 SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV
52 BURAI
53 PLOK!
54 R-TYPE III: THE THIRD LIGHTNING
55 THUNDER SPIRITS
56 UMIHARA KAWASE
57 EARTHBOUND
58 INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER
59 RENDERING RANGER
60 SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS
61 U.N. SQUADRON
62 THE LORD OF THE RINGS
63 TOP GEAR
64 AXELAY
65 DEMON'S CREST
66 NINJA GAIDEN TRILOGY
67 SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!
68 F-ZERO
69 SUPER STAR WARS
70 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES IV: TURTLES IN TIME
71 ART OF FIGHTING 2
72 CAPTAIN COMMANDO
73 SUPER MARIO KART
74 GRADIUS III
75 BATTLE CARS
76 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND
77 THE SIMPSONS: BART'S NIGHTMARE
78 BIO METAL
79 THE LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
80 EARTHWORM JIM
81 CLAY FIGHTER 2
82 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
83 SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2: THE NEW CHALLENGERS
84 THE KING OF DRAGONS
85 MICRO MACHINES
86 DAZE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
87 WILD GUNS

01 02



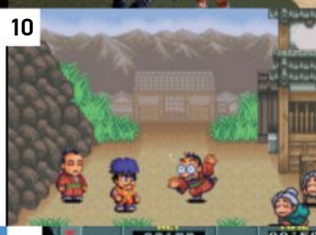
03



04



10



16



17



18



19



25



26



27



28



34



35



36



37



43



44



45



46



52



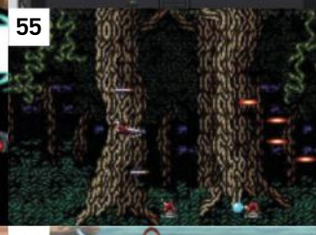
53



54



55



61



62



63



64



70



71



72



73



79



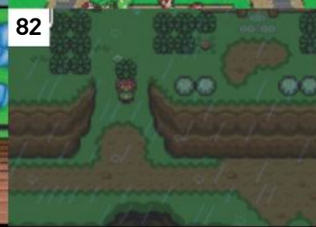
80



81



82




05

06

07

08

09

11

12
Ark.

13

14

15

20

21

22

23
The village is engulfed

24
circo
HARBORLAND

29
HIT WALL

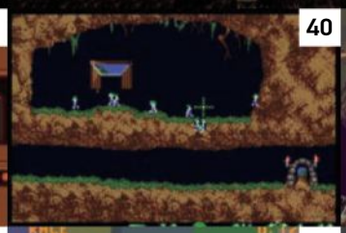
30
50000
610
02

31

32

33

38

39

40

41

42

47

48

49

50

51
ENEMY

56

57

58
ITALY
BRAZIL

59

60

65

66

67
NINTENDO

68

69

74

75

77

78

83

84
ENEMY

85

86

87
RESTAURANT

MR VIDEO GAME

The Complete History of Mario

Mario has become one of the most recognisable videogame mascots of all time and has starred in two of the Super Nintendo's best platformers. With that in mind we felt it was only fair that we looked back at his many gaming achievements



To fully appreciate why Mario is still the videogame industry's most recognised, popular and enduring character, you have to look back to the early days of videogames. Mario remains the poster child for a time where everything about them felt fresh, innovative and new, and these newfangled virtual worlds sought only to be linked to ours through the computers and consoles that projected them and the talented visionaries who imagined them. With realism and trends now sitting where fun and creativity once ruled, today's industry is looking a much different place to one that Nintendo was helping rebuild back in the Eighties.

With every familiar-looking sandbox RPG-lite shooter that finds release, it becomes ever apparent that this industry has, in many ways, started to fold in on itself. The insane budgets required to build the games of today mean that now only a small handful of developers and publishers have the financial means to call the shots, game genres seem to be melding together, and despite now being able to utilise gazillions of colours, games are looking a little less colourful. Why the Wii currently stands as the triumphant console of this generation, and *Super Mario Galaxy 2* has scooped universal acclaim, should be obvious to anyone who enjoyed playing videogames throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Nintendo has proven, once again, that fun and creativity are king.

It's for this reason why most gamers can instantly recall the first time they ever saw Mario in action. He takes them back to an evergreen era for videogames, a time with which he has now become synonymous. For many of you reading this, we suspect that your first experience came from playing *Donkey Kong* in arcades, or on home computers and consoles. At this inaugural point in his career, Mario was known by the more literal-sounding name of Jumpman, played a bit of an antihero, and worked as a carpenter instead of the heroic plumber we all know him as today. However, while Mario's personality, name and occupation would come to change quite quickly following his gaming debut in 1981, the distinct look of the character was settled on almost immediately by his creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, and has only really ever been refined, never changed, over the years.

As was the practice in the early days of game design, Mario was borne out from the technical limitations of his time. The character was given his signature flat cap owing to the fact that it would save Miyamoto the headache of animating hair, a large nose to make him look instantly more human, bright red coveralls to help him stand out against *Donkey Kong*'s dark backgrounds, and a moustache instead of a mouth for similar reasons. But Mario's creation also came about through an

Super Mario Moments

1985 SUPER MARIO BROS



1986 SUPER MARIO BROS THE LOST LEVELS



1988 (USA) SUPER MARIO BROS 2



1988 SUPER MARIO BROS 3



1989 SUPER MARIO LAND



1990 SUPER MARIO WORLD



1995 SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND



1996 SUPER MARIO 64



2002 SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE



2006 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS



2007 SUPER MARIO GALAXY



2009 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS WII



2011 SUPER MARIO 3D LAND



2013 SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD



Professions of a Plumber

The versatile hero has appeared in a string of occupational cameos for Nintendo over the years...

Carpenter
Donkey Kong 1981
■ Mario's first ever job was as a mallet-wielding carpenter in *Donkey Kong*. It's likely that his profession was inspired by the everyman-type scenarios on which Nintendo based many of its Game & Watch titles.





Plumber
Mario Bros 1983
■ After a two-year stint working as a carpenter, Mario turned his talents to plumbing – as well as the odd bit of pest extermination too – for *Mario Bros*. He kept the role for the subsequent *Super Mario Bros* series.

Umpire
Tennis 1984
■ Mario earned extra cash at weekends working as a tennis umpire. Later in life he decided to take up the sport himself when he realised that more money was to be had playing than interfering.



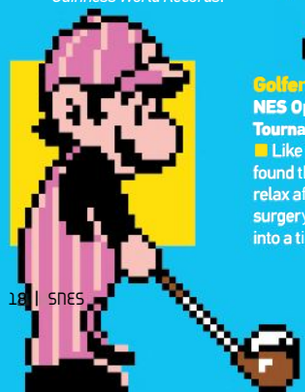


Referee
Punch-Out!! 1987
■ Following a successful spell as a tennis umpire, Mario caught the eye of the Nintendo Boxing Commission and was approached to work as a referee in the Famicom/NES version of *Punch-Out!!*.

Doctor
Dr Mario 1990
■ Making a mint working as a boxing ref, Mario left labouring to go to medical school. It took him just two years to complete his doctorate – earning him a place in *Guinness World Records*.



Golfer
NES Open Tournament Golf 1991
■ Like most doctors, Mario found that the best way to relax after a busy day in surgery was to smash a ball into a tiny hole.



MARIO MEMORIES



Jim Bagley
Classic Spectrum coder
I first saw Mario in the local arcade halls in New Brighton roughly around 1981 when *Donkey Kong* was released. *Donkey Kong* is and always will be a classic, and a great game to boot, but I can't help but admire so many other *Mario* games. *Super Mario Bros* is another fantastic *Mario* game that even to this day I like to play – even though my nephew completed it before I did! And what favourite *Mario* list would be complete without *Mario Kart*? I loved the N64 version the most, because my nephew, niece, sister and I used to play it at the weekends with riotous laughter, especially when zapping someone on the jump in Wario Stadium. And I can't go without saying *New Super Mario Bros*. I also loved it, again, because of the original features, like being able to grow huge and sprint through the level. Out of those four, those being my favourites, if I had to choose one... I'm not sure I can! They all have a huge place in my heart. Why has Mario remained so enduring? Well because he's constantly re-inventing himself, changing with the times, and because Shigeru Miyamoto is simply a genius.



John Carmack
Co-Founder id Software
I have followed Mario since the *Donkey Kong* days, and id Software was pretty much launched on the merits of an internal clone of *Super Mario Bros 3*. I was away for a while after *Super Mario 64*, but the last few years with my son have brought me back into the fold – we just collected our 66th star on *Super Mario Galaxy 2* last night, and we have gone back through all the old games. Still fun after all these years. Domo arigato, Miyamoto-san!



Kevin Toms
Creator of Football Manager
I remember my first recollection of Mario being on the original Nintendo cartridge machine. Squat, cute character, red hat comes to mind. Probably I would go for *Mario Kart* on the Nintendo 64 as my *Mario* game. His lasting appeal is down to the personality he puts across: an upbeat, likable, jolly man. Most people would get on with someone like that. So he annoys no one!

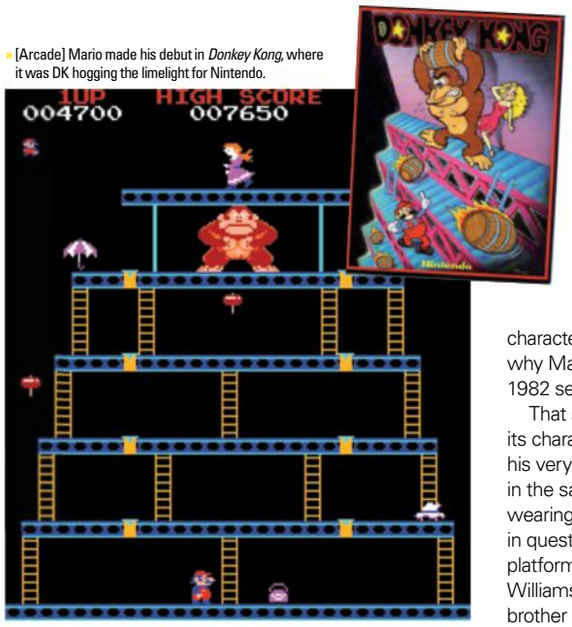


■ [PC-88] Hudson Soft released two peculiar variants of *Mario Bros* for Japanese home computers.



■ [NES] The original *SMB* still plays great today . We should know – we played it yesterday.

» [Arcade] Mario made his debut in *Donkey Kong*, where it was DK hogging the limelight for Nintendo.



element of luck and good fortune – although it probably didn't seem that way to Nintendo at the time.

'I'll save yer, lady!'

Before *Donkey Kong* was even considered, Shigeru Miyamoto had aims to create a new arcade game starring the characters from the popular King Features Syndicate cartoon, *Popeye*. But when Nintendo failed to obtain the licence, Miyamoto was forced to come up with three central characters of his own. And, after taking pretty obvious inspiration from the 1933 stop-motion monster classic, *King Kong*, he came up with the characters Jumpman, Lady and Donkey Kong to substitute the roles of Popeye, Olive Oyl and Bluto, respectively.

When the time came for *Donkey Kong* to ship to North America, however, it was decided that Jumpman should be renamed during the localisation process. Even then, Nintendo's intention was to turn Mario into a mascot-type character by having him appear in many of Miyamoto's subsequent videogames. With this idea in mind, the first new name that Nintendo would settle on for Jumpman was 'Mr Video'. It was a name clearly derived from Nintendo's first ever gaming mascot, Mr Game & Watch.

However, in what became one of the videogame industry's most bizarre anecdotes, Jumpman's name would change once again. The tale goes that, at the time when Nintendo of America (NOA) was trying to gain a foothold in North America, it was renting a warehouse from an Italian construction tycoon named Mario Segale. Segale was said to have looked remarkably similar to Jumpman, and when NOA's president at the time, Minoru Arakawa, realised the coincidence, Jumpman was nicknamed Mario and the name stuck. What makes the story all the more ironic is the fact that Mario Segale's business was construction, an industry that played a prominent role in the look of *Donkey Kong*'s stages. We can neither confirm nor deny whether Segale once owned a giant gorilla that he would occasionally mistreat, though we're guessing that it was highly unlikely.

With the character renamed, Lady rechristened Pauline, and the localisation process complete, Nintendo pushed *Donkey Kong* out onto the US market, where it became a huge success. And with the millions of dollars it earned, the company was able to fund development of its first true videogame console, the Famicom. But it was Donkey Kong, not Mario, who was gaining the most celebrity for Nintendo. Despite the fact that the big dumb ape was assigned the role of big dumb antagonist in *Donkey Kong*, his domineering presence and cartoon qualities made him a clear standout character in the game. And it is perhaps for this reason why Mario was then made to play villain in the game's 1982 sequel, *Donkey Kong Jr.*

That said, Nintendo, obviously not wanting to turn its character into an out-and-out baddie, did give Mario his very own game in the same year, plonking him back in the saddle of hero and gifting him a green coverall-wearing brother called Luigi into the bargain. The game in question, *Mario Bros*, was a single-screen action platformer that looked and played similar to the earlier Williams arcade game *Joust*. It saw Mario and his brother battle through 'phases' of enemy attacks inside a New York sewer, and was the first game to ever depict the brothers as plumbers – it's believed that this was done simply to explain the game's culvert setting. However, with its premise finding the pair trying to prevent an infestation of insect and reptilian pests escaping into the city, the brothers are clearly acting more like exterminators in the game. Nevertheless, as well as portraying the brothers as plumbers, *Mario Bros* also introduced a few common enemy types too, such as Shellcreepers – a precursor to Koopa Troopas – and the annoying spike-shelled foes, the Spinies. It also established the idea of having the brothers collect coins through bonus rounds, as well as the concept of brick-punching and unconscious-enemy toe-punting, all of which would become staples of the *Mario* series.

» [NES] Who can forget this trick in World 1-2? Who was it that said cheating doesn't pay? Someone who'd never played *Super Mario Bros*, clearly.



Mario Bros received a lukewarm arcade reception, certainly nothing in the same league as *Donkey Kong*, but later proved to be a popular release for the NES in North America. Two variants of the game were also developed by Hudson Soft, under licence from Nintendo. Released exclusively on Japanese home computers, the games featured all-new original stages and gameplay mechanics. The first, *Mario Bros Special*, was an interesting update of the original game that saw players having to fight their way to exit points at the top of each stage, while the second title, *Punch Ball Mario Bros*, was a quirky dodgeball-inspired iteration that saw the brothers punching balls at their subterranean foes and hitting switches. Hudson Soft also later released its own version of *Super Mario Bros*. Titled *Super Mario Bros Special*, this unfairly punishing home computer version featured all-new levels, hair-pulling level design and maddening flick-screen scrolling. In fact, the dodgy scrolling mars the experience so much that it shows just how important a factor scrolling actually played in *Super Mario Bros*' ultimate success.

But we're jumping ahead of ourselves a bit here, as Mario hadn't quite gone 'super' just yet. In fact, while it's debatable that Miyamoto dabbled with the idea of giving Mario enhanced powers in *Mario Bros* by finally giving him the ability to survive a fall – he wasn't capable of bending his knees in *Donkey Kong* – it wasn't really until the release of *Super Mario Bros* in 1985 that the legendary game designer gave his creation real super powers. Before reaching this watershed moment, though, the character could be seen busily living up to his 'Mr Video' duties. The multipurpose butterball could be seen popping up in a bonus stage in the NES game *Pinball* that same year, guest appearing as an unshaven umpire in *Tennis* (1984), and influencing the look of *Golf*'s (1984) moustachioed golfer Ossan, a character

MARIO MEMORIES



Eugene Jarvis
Arcade legend

My first recollection of Mario was in *Donkey Kong*. The character was ridiculous. Why am I a carpenter trying to rescue a princess from King Kong? *Super Mario Bros* is the greatest videogame of all time. It is etched in my brain like a phosphorescent cattle brand. Mario is the video star. He has been flogged and baked into the collective memory of humanity for 30 years. When the last cockroach is dead he will dance on the grave.



Jamie Woodhouse
Creator of Qwak!

I'm fairly sure my first experience of Mario was *Mario Bros* on the NES; I remember it not scrolling, just a static screen, with lots of turtles that go into pipes in the bottom corners of the screen, then coming out of pipes in the top corners. Characters were all simple, yet fun-looking, with a cutesy round feel to them. I think my all-time favourite *Mario* game is probably *Super Mario Land* on the Game Boy: simple, fun gameplay, not too complicated graphically, and of course, it was portable! I think maybe Mario's appeal is down to the personality of the character; I mean, he's not really a violent kind of dude, is he? And he's only there in the first place because he's trying to sort out the big bad boss or rescue his girlfriend – or was that the other game, the one with the big monkey? So I guess, maybe because he's not too violent, and he's there for a good reason, people maybe relate to that. Also, it can't hurt having the Nintendo marketing department on your side!



MARIO MEMORIES

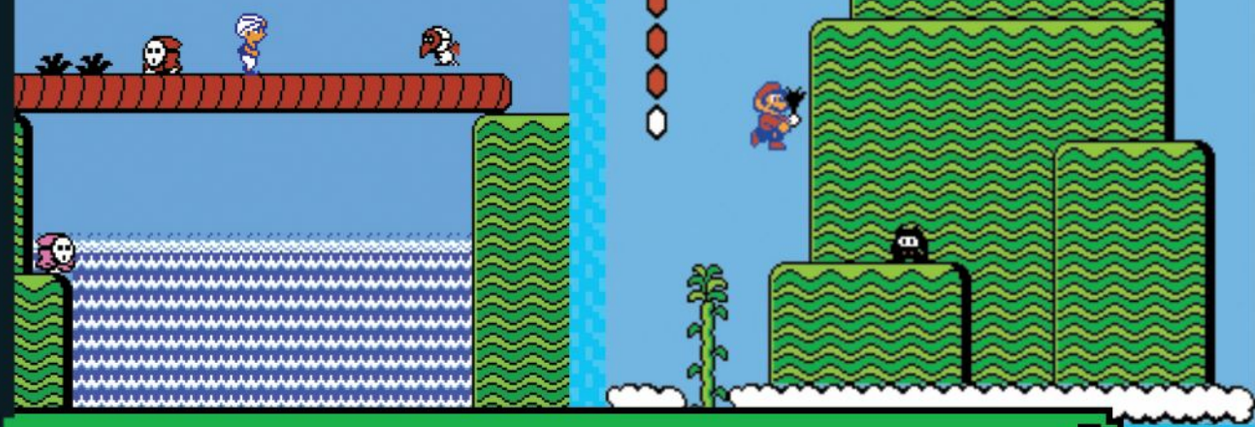


Jon Hare
Co-Founder Sensible Software

First time I saw Mario was *Donkey Kong* in the arcades in about 1980. I didn't focus on the character much, to be honest – nothing that special. I thought the monkey was the best thing in the game. My all-time favourite *Mario* game has to be *Mario Golf* on the N64. It just has the most perfectly tuned learning curve ever. I spent a whole year trying to win every trophy and kept missing the final one by just one shot. Next best titles would be *Mario 64* and *Mario Kart*. I think Mario endures because he is a really good everyman character, funny but not too irritating, and he has an army of fellow characters that add a lot to him. Miyamoto is the only game designer that I look up to.



[FDS] If you think this game looks a lot like *SMB2*, that's because 95 per cent of it is.



MARIO MEMORIES



Scott Miller
Founder of Apogee Software

I first remember Mario playing *Donkey Kong*, of course! When I first discovered this game in an arcade I knew it had something special about it, interesting characters, unique gameplay, variety, and it was a deeply polished game. From the get-go I knew it was the start of a new era, but no one could have guessed the staying power of this squatty plumber!



Alex Trowers
Designer of classic Bullfrog games

I suppose the first time I saw Mario in action was in *Super Mario Bros*, but that's only because the Mario in *Donkey Kong* was called Jumpman. I found *SMB* a bit meh – despite the knocking-things-over-from-underneath mechanic and a two-player option, the whole thing felt a little repetitive. I loved *Donkey Kong* in the arcades, though, and the ColecoVision version, which was the scene of some epic high-score battles between my brother, my mum and I. I can also remember a version of *Super Mario 3* on an old Nintendo Play Choice 10 machine in a local kebab shop. That was entertaining. Suddenly Mario could do all manner of interesting things and that was quite appealing. My favourite *Mario* game is a toss-up between *Super Mario World* on the Super Famicom and *Super Mario 64* on the N64. Some guys from Imagineer brought a Super Famicom over around the time of the Japanese launch and lent it to us. It had two games: *F-Zero* and *Super Mario World*. We played them both pretty religiously, to the extent that we managed to overheat and blow up the console.

Super Mario World was one of the first games I completed in Japanese despite there being a whole ton of stuff that Mario could do. Of course, I couldn't read any of the hints, meaning I missed the one about being able to throw shells up in the air. This meant that to complete the final boss, I had to get the cape on an earlier level and make it through the last castle without getting hit. Once [there], I had to wait on one side of the screen for him to drop a Koopa before running along, jumping, hitting the thing and grabbing the shell, before using the momentum to fly up to the top of the screen and dropping the shell on him from above. I remember thinking it was tricky at the time [and] put it down to it being the end of the game.



John Romero
Co-Founder of id Software

The first time I saw Mario in action, I was at an arcade in Roseville, California, called Supercade. It was a weekend in 1981 and my friend Robert was with me. At this time in 1981, new games were showing up every week. The arcades were the most exciting places in the world. And in this particular arcade, this particular weekend, was a new game called *Donkey Kong*. We went up to the game, dropped in our quarters, and lost ourselves for several hours. When the smoke cleared, we had found a new favourite game and a favourite carpenter named Jumpman, who would be renamed in four years to the familiar name: Mario. We loved Mario's pixelated figure, his cute animations and cuter sound effects. His job was to rescue the princess and put out fire with a mallet. We loved the ridiculousness of it, and it fit in perfectly with the extreme abstractness of games of that time. For me, *Super Mario 3* was the pinnacle. It was just so epic. That game pushed the original NES to the extreme. The cartridge was packed to the limit with data – the game was huge at the time. And it took a while to play through. I was playing it in my Gamer's Edge office next to John Carmack as he coded.

often mistaken for Mario, owing to his stark resemblance to Nintendo's mascot.

Super Mario... Finally

Super Mario Bros was, in many respects, the natural next step for the main series to take. It took the popular 'rescue the girl' premise of *Donkey Kong*, applied it to the theme and two-player mode – albeit not simultaneous this time – introduced in *Mario Bros*, and then stretched the gameplay into a revolutionary side-scrolling platform game. Set in the fantasy fungal world of the Mushroom Kingdom, the 'Super' prefix came from the brothers' peculiar reaction to ingesting magic mushrooms, which took the form of power-ups in the game. Eating a mushroom would cause Mario and Luigi to grow in size, this growth spurt essentially acting like a shield but at the cost of making them easier for enemies to hit. And while in this state the eating of a Fire Flower power-up would make the plumbers truly super-powered, dressing them in lustrous white overalls and giving them the ability to lob fireballs.

Speaking in 1991's *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto revealed how the brothers' iconic growth spurt ability in the game came about: "We developed programming techniques that allowed us to create a larger character than we originally thought possible. At first, we planned to make the game so that the player was always 'big' Mario, but eventually, we came up with the idea for the power-up mushroom to make Mario Super."

Super Mario Bros was praised for its innovative gameplay, great visuals, catchy music, super-smooth scrolling, and wealth of secrets to discover – the most notable of which saw Mario actually breaking out of his own videogame in World 1-2; a truly mind-bending concept at the time, made even more impressive by the fact that doing so rewarded the player with the opportunity to warp to later levels in the game.

Selling over 40 million copies, *Super Mario Bros*' popularity can be largely attributed to the success of the Famicom/NES, and thus for also playing a key role in helping to resurrect the console industry in North America following its crash in 1983. In fact, *Super Mario Bros* currently stands as the second bestselling videogame of all time, only topped by *Wii Sports Resort* last year, demonstrating the sheer impact that this single game had on the games industry.

But *Super Mario Bros* wasn't the only *Mario* title released in 1985. The little-known NES game *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario continue in the tradition of his earlier arcade-style games. Rearmed with his trusty carpenter's hammer, and accompanied by Luigi, the game was a fun mix of smash-'em-up and puzzle

game. Capping the brothers' ability to jump, *Wrecking Crew* saw Mario and Luigi race around, smashing bricks and pillars in an advantageous order so as to clear each stage of everything destructible. It even came with a level designer. But while a neat concept, it fell into obscurity in the shadow of *Super Mario Bros.*

Sequel Sequel Panic

Now if there's one thing that Nintendo was seen to struggle with during the 8-bit era, it was sequels. While *Donkey Kong Jr* was an enjoyable enough successor, it really wasn't a patch on the tight, engaging and insanely addictive gameplay of *Donkey Kong.* And while *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* had its good moments, to this day it's still deemed by many fans to be one of the weakest entries in the series. The *Super Mario Bros* series is no different and follows this peculiar pattern.

"Mario played a key role in resurrecting the American industry"

Owing to *Super Mario Bros*' success, Nintendo was understandably keen to capitalise on the game's popularity and so quickly pushed out an expert version exclusively for the Famicom Disk System to satiate demand. Released in 1986 as *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, it was a single-player game only, with players given the choice of picking between a 'Mario game' or 'Luigi game', and the brothers were given different attributes: Mario had better traction; Luigi a higher jump. On top of this, the difficulty level was also increased, and the game made more challenging through the inclusion of poisonous mushrooms and more aggressive enemies. But when the game came to ship to North America, NOA stressed its concerns that the game wasn't different enough to be deemed a true sequel, and would be too challenging for Western gamers. Consequently, Nintendo was forced to do some rapid troubleshooting, and this led it to re-skin another platform game by Miyamoto and his team titled *Yume Kojo: Doki Doki Panic.*

Released for the Famicom Disk System in Japan, *Doki Doki* garnered modest sales, likely owing to its Disk System exclusivity, and so Nintendo had the brainwave of switching the game's four Arabian heroes with Mario, Luigi, Toad and Princess Toadstool (Peach) and repackaging it as *Super Mario Bros 2* in the West. Without the aid of the internet back then, a very large proportion of the planet would be none the wiser of this cheeky game swap. Of course, we later got the chance to test our skills on the Japanese sequel when it was remade as *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels* for the 1993 *Super Mario All-Stars* compilation pack on the Super Nintendo.

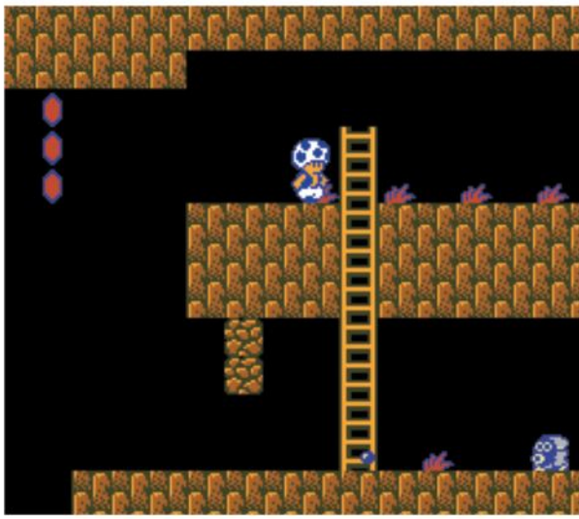
To tie everything together, *Doki*'s story was altered to explain away all the crazy Arabian leftovers – something about Mario entering a dream world called Subcon to defeat an evil frog overlord to free some enslaved fairy kids – and the game switch also explains why many of the enemies in the game never reappeared in subsequent *Mario* games, and Mario and pals' peculiar new attack method, which ditches head-stomping to see them instead pick up objects and enemies and toss them at other enemies.

Released in the US in 1988, the re-skinned *Doki Doki* version of *Super Mario Bros 2* became a hot seller for the NES, becoming the third-bestselling game on the console, trading more copies than *The Legend Of Zelda.* And owing to its success, this version was later released in Japan in 1992 under the name *Super Mario USA.*

Hollywood comes-a knockin'

Towards the end of the Eighties, *Mario*-mania was starting to take effect, and its momentum was to be fuelled even further with the release of a game that many fans still consider to be the best game in the series. Taking two years to create, *Super Mario Bros 3* introduced more staples to the *Mario* series than any sequel before or since. It introduced elements such as an overworld map, complete with patrolling enemies that whisked the player to battle screens; enjoyable diversions by way of photo-fit mini-games; multiple routes through the game's eight massive worlds; new power-ups in the form of abstract costumes for the brothers; an inventory that allowed you to carry over items obtained in one stage into another, and more secrets than you could shake a Warp Whistle at.

To help create awareness and excitement for the release of the game in the US, *Super Mario*

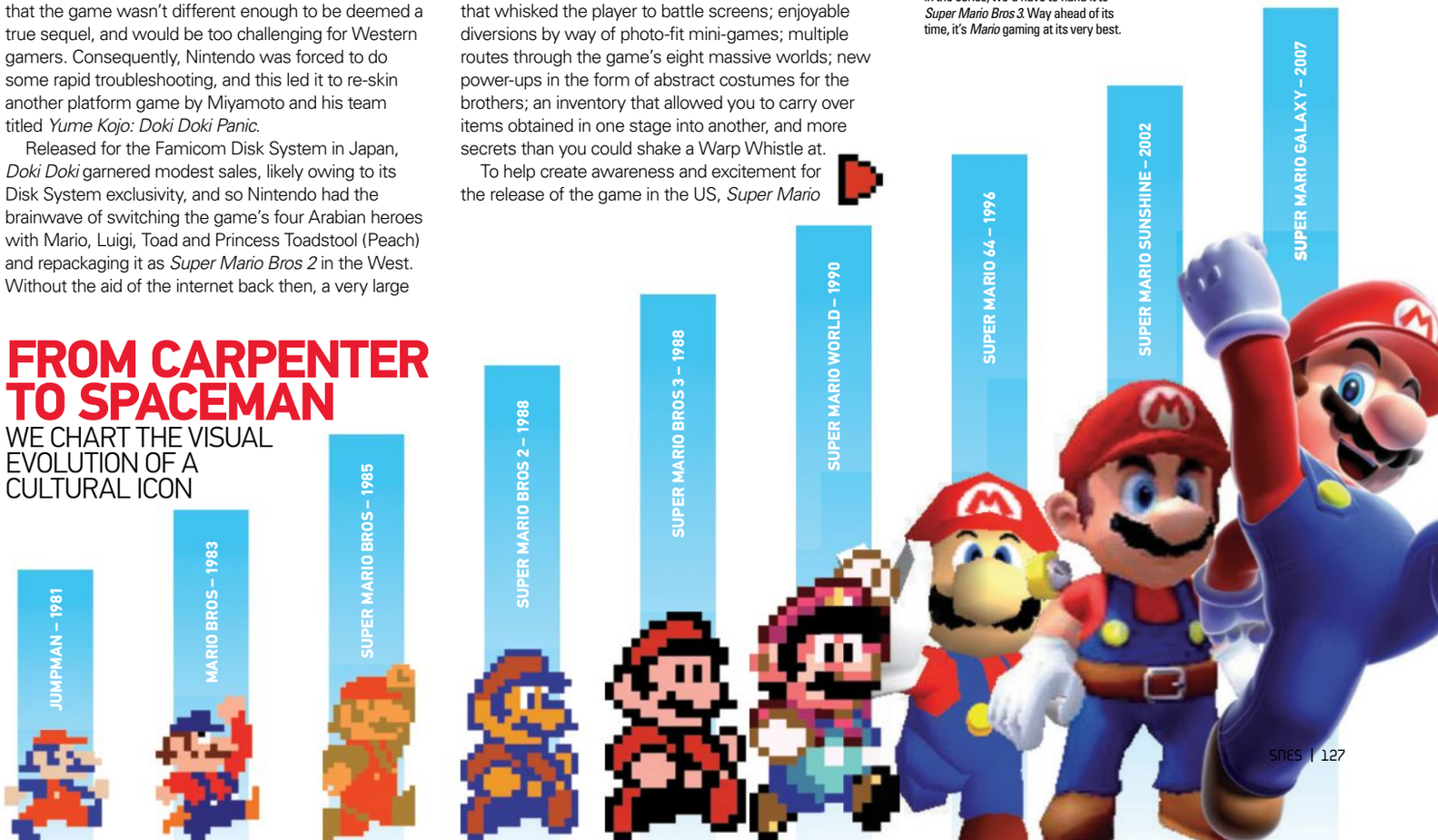




» [NES] If we had to pick the best game in the series, we'd have to hand it to *Super Mario Bros 3.* Way ahead of its time, it's *Mario* gaming at its very best.

FROM CARPENTER TO SPACEMAN

WE CHART THE VISUAL EVOLUTION OF A CULTURAL ICON



MR. VIDEOGAME



» [SNES] The colourful *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *SMB3* template.

MARIO MEMORIES

Gary Bracey Software Manager Ocean Software



I spent quite some time in the early Eighties playing in the arcades, and so my first actual introduction to Mario was *Donkey Kong*. I recall he was the first 'human' character I had seen in games, as all others were cartoon or abstract like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*. My next major encounter was when Ocean obtained the rights to convert the first *Mario Bros* platform game, which was an okay game. However, when I discovered *Super Mario Bros* on the NES I was completely blown away and spent many, many weeks playing it to completion... and then playing it again! It's one of the few franchises that has never suffered from compromise. Nintendo recognises this and *Zelda* to be its bar-setting titles, and also its console-shifting games. If they released a sub-par version then not only would the whole perception of the franchise suffer, but it would probably impact sales of the hardware. As for the character itself, he is as synonymous with Nintendo as Mickey Mouse is to Disney, yet a lot more contemporary. Over the years they have managed to develop his personality to keep pace with the advances in console technology, so from the original few pixels there is now a 'fleshed out' character with personality and charisma. From my own perspective, Mario is a reason alone to purchase any new Nintendo console, and I can think of no greater compliment to pay.

Trip Hawkins Founder of Electronic Arts



Naturally my first time seeing Mario was *Donkey Kong* in an arcade in Silicon Valley, perhaps 30 years ago. Miyamoto-san is the best game designer in the history of the industry, and Mario's appeal is ubiquitous.

Bros 3 was memorably first unveiled to Americans in the 1989 feature film *The Wizard*. Released into theatres a few months prior to the game's North American release, the movie's plot culminated in a Nintendo videogame tournament that ended with the finalists competing on a mysterious 'new game', which is revealed to be *Super Mario Bros 3*. Probably at the request of Nintendo, the game is hilariously unveiled in the film as if it were the single most brilliant objet d'art in the history of mankind. Although in hindsight we can let Nintendo off a little, as it actually comes pretty darn close.

But that wasn't all in the way of *Mario* marketing that year, as 1989 also spawned an animated/live action television show: *The Super Mario Bros Super Show!* The programme was an odd format that comprised a short ten-minute cartoon bookended by a peculiar live-action sitcom, in which Luigi was played by actor Danny Wells and Mario by former professional WWF wrestler Captain Lou Albano. Filmed in front of a probably perplexed studio audience, the show saw the pair conversing with drop-in celebrity guests from inside their *Bottom*-style dilapidated New York apartment, and in some episodes dress up in women's clothes to portray female versions of Mario and Luigi named Marianne and Luigeena. And if you think that sounds like a bizarre idea for a *Mario Bros* television show, during the holiday season of 1989 and 1990, Southern Californians witnessed *King Koopa's Kool Kartoons*, a live-action Krusty the Clown-type kids' telly show in which a guy dressed as Bowser presented cartoons to a room full of children, fondly referred to in the show as 'Koopa Troopas'.

1989 also marks the release of the Game Boy and saw Mario lose the pounds for his first proper portable adventure, *Super Mario Land*. A launch title for the Game Boy in Japan and North America, *Super Mario Land* was overseen by the *Donkey Kong* co-designer and *Metroid* and *Kid Icarus* producer, Gunpei Yokoi, and his solo involvement in the game resulted in a unique *Mario* title for the handheld. Putting his own stamp on the series, head-stomping Koopa Troopas now turned them into ticking time bombs, while striking some enemies in the game transformed them into a pile of decomposing bones. And elements of Yokoi's earlier work also found their way subtly into the game, such as a subterranean-style stage reminiscent of *Metroid* (Level 3-4) and the game ending with a side-scrolling shooter stage that saw Mario piloting a plane – a similar closing stage also occurred in *Kid Icarus*. Likely owing to Mario's popularity and the Game Boy's high installed base, *Super Mario Land* became a hugely successful *Mario* title, going on to sell more than 14 million units. It also spawned two sequels: *Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins*, notable for introducing Mario's doppelgänger Wario to the series, and *Wario Land: Super Mario Land 3*, in which the demented-looking villain took centre stage as a controllable character, in another first for the series.

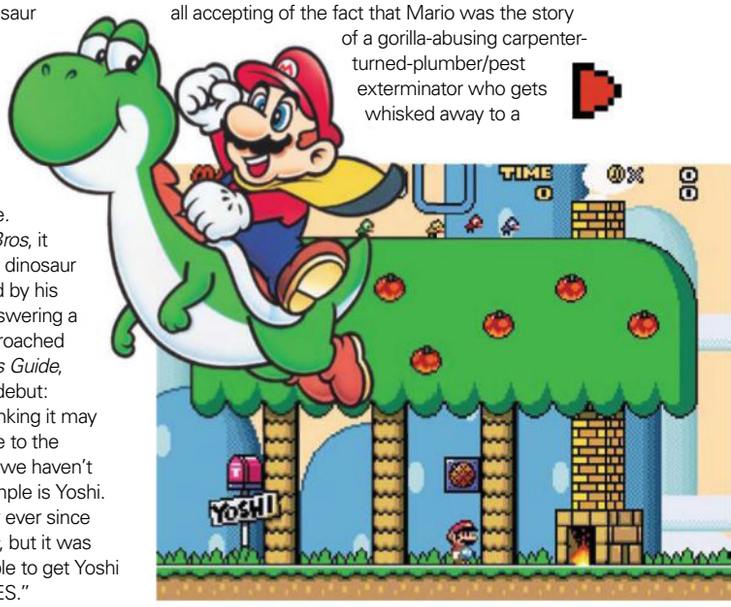
The arrival of the fourth generation of games consoles was an exciting time. Both the arcade and console markets were thriving, the NES had successfully brought gaming back home in North America, and Sega was officially first off the mark to make inroads into this new 16-bit era of gaming with the Mega Drive. With Mario now a global household name, gamers were eagerly anticipating the release of Nintendo's next instalment, especially as it was to be launched alongside its new-fangled 16-bit games console.

Released in 1990, *Super Mario World* stuck close to the *Super Mario Bros 3* template. Miyamoto and his team set about using the extra technical power of the Super Nintendo to create an enhanced, but not necessarily more innovative, version of the NES classic. Gone were the enjoyable mini-games and inventory, and Mario received a new makeover as well as an array of new power-ups, including a yellow cape that afforded him the power of temporary flight, and a lovable green dinosaur companion in the form of Yoshi – a character whose grabbing tongue was possibly inspired by Nintendo's popular Ultra Hand grabbing toy, and whose name could have derived as a portmanteau of Nintendo's then-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi. This is all pure **Retro Gamer** speculation, of course.

Following the release of *Super Mario Bros*, it was Miyamoto's intention to give Mario a dinosaur steed – an idea said to have been inspired by his motocross racing game, *Excitebike*. In answering a question about how he and his team approached *Mario* sequels in the *Mario Mania Player's Guide*, Miyamoto explained the delay in Yoshi's debut: "Once the game is released, we start thinking it may not be such a bad idea to add another title to the series. We usually have lots of ideas that we haven't been able to implement yet. A good example is Yoshi. We wanted to have Mario ride a dinosaur ever since we finished the original *Super Mario Bros*, but it was impossible technically. We were finally able to get Yoshi off the drawing boards with the Super NES."

Nintendo then followed up *Super Mario World* with *Super Mario Kart*. It became the bestselling racing game on the system, and Mario's most successful spin-off game series. Mario was now showing himself as a cultural icon, and the versatile face of Nintendo. In fact, his popularity had swelled so much that it was almost a given that the character would pique the interest of film studios wanting to cash in on his celebrity. And so Mario and Luigi did the inevitable, heading to the big screen for a live-action retelling of their videogame antics for the 1993 movie *Super Mario Bros*, plonking actors Bob Hoskins, John Leguizamo and Dennis Hopper in the roles of Mario, Luigi and Bowser, respectively. However, for all its promise and hype, the movie, which decides to throw out the colourful *Mario Bros* universe to plonk the brothers inside some kind of rubbish version of *Total Recall*, tanked at the box office and was branded an unmitigated big-budget failure, and Mario has never made a return to Tinseltown since.

Mario's next big Super Nintendo release came in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. In the game, Mario and Luigi were depicted as babies, with the player now fully assuming the role of a Yoshi and tasked with completing a colourful relay race to get Mario safely to his parents. Of course, given the infant ages of the brothers in the game, *SMW2* is deemed a prequel to the entire Mario series. Its story is thus pure retcon, as the game's ending shows the brothers delivered to their parents, who are seen living inside a house in the Mushroom Kingdom. That said, when you remember that before this point we were all accepting of the fact that Mario was the story of a gorilla-abusing carpenter-turned-plumber/pest exterminator who gets whisked away to a



"SMB3 was unveiled like the most brilliant objet d'art in history. It's actually close"



[SNES] Yoshi took centre stage in the sequel to *Mario World*, *Yoshi's Island*.





Steve Lycett
Sumo Digital

Boringly, I'll have to plump for *Super Mario World* as my favourite *Mario* game. I got a SNES for my 18th birthday, and lost weeks of my life hunting down all the hidden exits, completing Star Road and then rinsing it twice for the second credits sequence. An amazing game that's clearly ageing better than I am! I think his appeal simply boils down to quality. Bar the odd exception, if it's got 'Mario' in the title you know you'll be getting something that's been built with love, care and attention to detail, and will provide you with hours of fun. I'll happily buy a *Mario* title without reading a single review. Nintendo will always deliver the goods!



Ralph Baer Creator of videogames

To me, Mario is a living presence. I still have the original NES and the *Duck Hunt/Mario* cart that goes with it. Over the decades I have demonstrated interacting physically with the *Duck Hunt* game in the manner of today's Wii games. As has been so often the case, I was 20 years too early with those concepts. Meanwhile, who can resist playing the original *Mario* game when that old TV set is turned on in my demo area and I'm not bringing down those ducks by lobbing something physical at them?

MARIO MEMORIES





Philip and Andrew Oliver
Co-Founders Blitz Software

PO: We first saw Mario appear in the *Donkey Kong* arcade game in 1981. A few years later, in 1988, we went to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas and were stunned by the magnitude of the games industry and the size of Nintendo's presence. And at the heart of it all was Mario. At that time, *Super Mario Bros* was at its height on the NES – I think they'd sold in the region of 20 million copies, which was incredible.

AO: I remember seeing *Mario Bros* on a Japanese imported NES in about 1986. I remember it looking clean, slick and very playable. And best of all, it was instantly easily accessible. The first time I saw Mario as a character was in the arcade game *Donkey Kong*. Back then he didn't strike me as a brilliant character, but he always starred in brilliant games.

PO: All the Mario games are great. I guess we played the original a fair bit, but it was *Super Mario 64* that proved to the world that character games work better in 3D. Andrew will definitely go for *Mario Kart*, as it's his all-time favourite game! It's up there near the top with me too.

AO: Mario represents games of brilliant gameplay. He's also had a lot of work done on his 'personality', as the graphical powers of machines have been updated. Each revision has been very skilfully managed and has served to embellish and deepen Mario's qualities – they've been careful never to change his persona fundamentally, so the Mario today is essentially the same guy as the Mario of the Eighties.

Honourable Mentions

Here are some of the more unusual Mario games, which aren't part of the Super Mario canon



Mario Clash
VIRTUAL BOY

■ This red-looking 3D redux of the original *Mario Bros* coin-op was the first of two *Mario* games released for the Virtual Boy, the other being *Mario Tennis*. It's also the first ever 3D *Mario* game, if you discount *Super Mario Kart*.



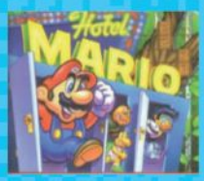
Alleyway
GAME BOY

■ Although not really a *Mario* game per se, this decent *Breakout* clone saw Mario piloting the game's bat. You couldn't actually tell this from the in-game graphics, mind, but he's there on the front of the box art, sporting some natty overalls.



Mario Paint
SUPER NINTENDO

■ One of the few games to use the Super Nintendo's mouse peripheral, which came as a pack-in with the game, this artistic spin-off allowed budding artists to create drawings, stamps and animations and then set them to sounds using a music generator.



Hotel Mario
PHILLIPS CD-I

■ Often cited as being the worst *Mario* game ever. This CD-i puzzle title was a waste product from the messy Super Nintendo CD saga and tasked players with rescuing Princess Toadstool by closing a whole bunch of doors, for reasons never explained.



All Night Nippon Super Mario Bros
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM

■ This game would be considered one of the most bizarre *Mario* clones to find release, were it not released by Nintendo. This *Super Mario Bros/Lost Levels* fusion featured DJs from a popular Japanese radio show.



Mario Education Games
NES, SNES, PC

■ The plumber also appeared in a series of educational games. These included the geography-themed *Mario Is Missing!*; the typing trainer, *Mario Teaches Typing*; and *Mario's Time Machine*, a thinly veiled history lesson.



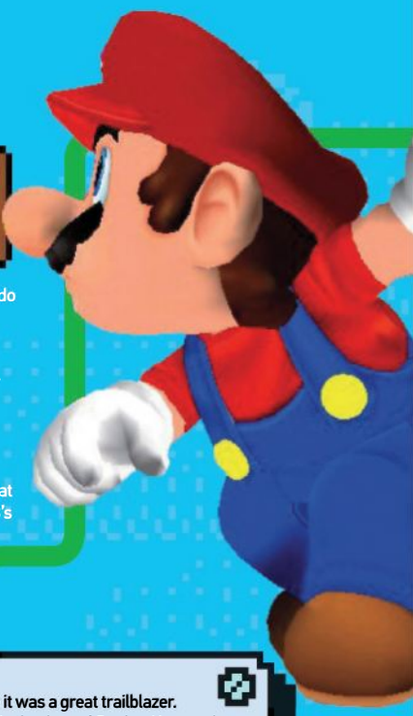
Super Mario Excitebike
SUPER NINTENDO (SATELLAVIEW)

■ Mario and friends appeared in this little-known *Excitebike* title, which meshed together *Mario Kart* with motocross. Released in four parts, it was only available through the Satellaview service.

A Friendly Rivalry... Eventually



No feature on Mario would be complete without at least mentioning the epic 16-bit videogame war that Mario played a major part in. During the height of the 16-bit generation, school playgrounds around the globe were divided. One side bound together by a love for a dinosaur-riding Italian plumber named Mario; the other in support for a skittish, edgy and nippy blue hedgehog called Sonic. These two company mascots could scarcely be more different, but together their rivalry spearheaded one of the most exciting periods in gaming ever. With each console generation that passed their competition softened, until Sega eventually bailed out of the hardware market altogether in 2001. What happened next, no school kid back in 1993 could ever have predicted: Sega started releasing *Sonic* games on Nintendo consoles, starting with *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* on Nintendo's GameCube. And then two videogame mascots got to finally settle their differences publicly when they appeared together in the game *Mario & Sonic At The Olympic Games* in 2007, followed by the long-awaited chance to beat the crap out of each other in 2008's *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.



MARIO MEMORIES



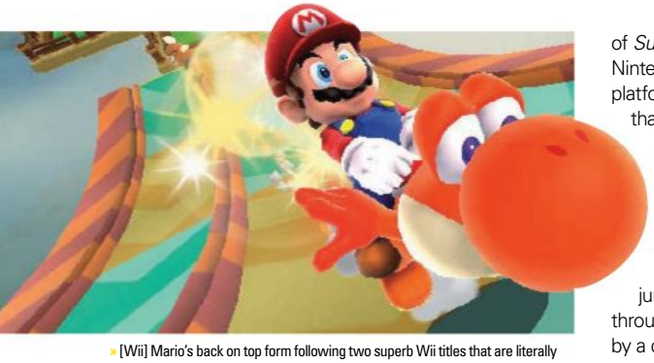
Martyn Brown Team 17 Founder

Obviously, like many people, I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but he really played second fiddle to DK. It's amazing to think that Nintendo took the Mario character and threw him into the *Super Mario* world, as it was an anonymous character before then. I wasn't super sure what to make of the first true *Mario* game in terms of character, other than it being brilliantly playable – I was too busy with the Amiga around that time anyway. I think my favourite *Mario* game has been *Super Mario 64*, the first 3D offering, because it was so incredibly well-considered for its time. I've enjoyed the past games, but they get a bit too hardcore for me. Mario's remained so enduring because he's so charming and a lot of fun. The games are generally so well-balanced to play that it's difficult to get too frustrated and therefore swear at him, although I'm sure it's been done a few times – even by me.



David Braben Co-Creator of Elite

I think my first experience of Mario was in a pub, in the original *Donkey Kong*. To be honest I didn't particularly register the character, more the way the game was played, which seemed a little bizarre at the time! *Mario 64* on the Nintendo 64 was the first Mario game I really enjoyed playing, as it was, for me at least, less annoying than the previous outings. Later games are great too, but *Mario 64* sticks in my mind the strongest, as for its time **it was a great trailblazer.** Interestingly, in the days of *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros* the character image was pretty indistinct and heavily pixelated. Later games featured him as an image, and I think that is when he started to be identified, but *Mario 64* was the first game, I think, that really made a character out of him, for example when he spoke on the title screen of the game. If anything, especially in the USA, I think he has become the icon of Nintendo. Other factors – like the fact that he seems to run like a toddler does – makes him pretty endearing. He is a pretty non-threatening character.



[Wii] Mario's back on top form following two superb Wii titles that are literally out of this world.

mushroom land through a giant pipe and must then rescue their princess from a giant turtle king, we guess such changes can be forgiven.

Released in 1996, Mario's final Super Nintendo outing saw him throw his cap into another new genre, this time the RPG with the Square-developed *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars*. The game was a mixture of isometric platform RPG and turn-based battles, and the game's visuals utilised the snazzy ACM graphics techniques seen in *Donkey Kong Country*. But coming late in the Super Nintendo's life, and only released in the US and Japan, it was largely missed by many on its release.

Mario reaches 64

Another new console saw another groundbreaking entry in the *Mario* series come, this time in the form of *Super Mario 64* for the N64. Always innovating, Nintendo once again sought to revolutionise the platform genre, and in doing so proved undoubtedly that the creative, fun, engaging and abundant gameplay of previous *Mario* adventures could adapt to a true 3D polygon world unscathed. The N64's analogue controls also worked overtime to further enhance the experience. With a wealth of new acrobatic moves at Mario's disposal, *Mario 64* turned him from portly jumpy plumber into a gaming Baryshnikov. Finally, through a series of open-ended levels – all connected by a castle-shaped hub – that unfurled with each revisit, it offered players the chance to really immerse themselves in the colourful and enchanting world of the Mushroom Kingdom. It was truly the gaming equivalent of chasing the rabbit down to Wonderland, and with the inclusion of Mips the rabbit in the game, who spouted dialogue very similar to Lewis Carroll's tardy White Rabbit, this notion was clearly not lost on Miyamoto and his EAD team.

Following the release of *Mario 64*, Mario himself then broke into even more game genres with the first entry in the Hudson-developed *Mario Party* series. And the N64 era also saw Mario return to his NES sporting roots in *Mario Golf* and *Mario Tennis*, before appearing in the first *Super Smash Bros* and making his final 'so long' for the console with *Paper Mario*.

Owing to the early release of *Mario 64* on the N64, it comes as a surprise to many that a sequel was never released on the system. Well, in actual fact, for a time a *Mario 64* sequel was in development, albeit for the 64DD. In 1997 Miyamoto revealed to E3 attendees that work had started on the game. However, following the disastrous launch of the add-on in Japan, and its subsequent poor domestic sales, Nintendo promptly stopped support for the hardware and the game was scrapped.

During Nintendo's Space World event in 2000, the company showcased the power of its brand new console, the GameCube, with a *Mario* tech demo dubbed *Super Mario 128*. The short demonstration showed a large 2D Mario splintering into 128 smaller versions that ran across the surface of a globe. It showcased, for the first time, the 'sphere-walking' tech that was to be later utilised for *Super Mario Galaxy*.

The following year, however, and at the same show, *Super Mario Sunshine* was unveiled to the crowds, and while it shared little likeness to *Super Mario 128*, it was formally announced as the official sequel to *Mario 64*. Apart from a story that saw Mario partaking in a spot of community service after the squeaky plumber is forced to clean up the mess left by a muck-spraying imposter, *Sunshine* stuck very close to *Mario 64*'s template.

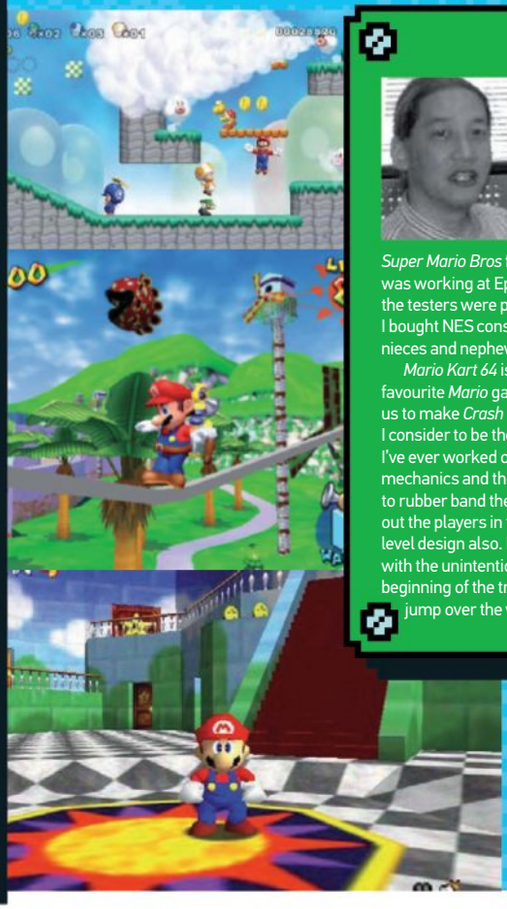
Set in the sun-drenched Isle Delfino, *Sunshine* kept the popular hub structure of *Mario 64*, and progression still relied on the collection of Stars – now named Shine Sprites. As well as the 3D return of Yoshi, the most novel feature in *Sunshine* came in the form of an odd rucksack armament called FLUDD (Flash Liquidizing Ultra Dousing Device) that Mario could use not only as a cleaning weapon but also as a way to help get around the stages. Clever aiming of the FLUDD's spray nozzles

MARIO MEMORIES



Ste Pickford
Legendary 8-bit coder

Definitely *Donkey Kong* in Stockport Arcade, or maybe on holiday in Blackpool or Southport. Of course I never knew that was Mario at the time. I could never get past the second screen, but must have spent dozens of 10ps trying. The first real introduction to Mario was at Rare. We had a meeting there in about 1988, and they showed us *Super Mario Bros* on a NES. We must have just screwed our faces up because of how ugly it looked. We were heavily into developing Amiga and Atari ST games at the time, and had sort of graduated from blocky four-colour graphics to higher-res 16-colour graphics with large, non-repeating bitmaps. The Stampers told us to ignore the fact that it didn't look that good, and insisted that we play it because it was better than any Amiga game. We laughed, but I think they lent us a NES with a couple of games, and sure enough, *Super Mario Bros* was brilliant. The irony is that the simple, functional graphics of *SMB* have dated much better than the over-worked Amiga graphics of the same period. Without a doubt my favourite Mario game is *Super Mario Bros 3*. We were developing NES games ourselves when it was released, and we were just blown away by how much better this game was than anything we were working on. It was at that point that I first appreciated what a great designer Mr Miyamoto was, and what a great developer Nintendo is. They were streets ahead of everyone else in the world at that time. That game introduced so many new ideas, and had so much imagination – every new level was surprising and delightful. I don't think that level of consistent invention in one game has been matched by any game since, until *Super Mario Galaxy*, but *Super Mario Bros 3* wins for me because of the big impression it made on me when I was younger.



» [N64] A landmark game for Mario, which set an unreachable benchmark for future 3D games to try to meet.

MARIO MEMORIES

Greg Omi
Atari Lynx progammer

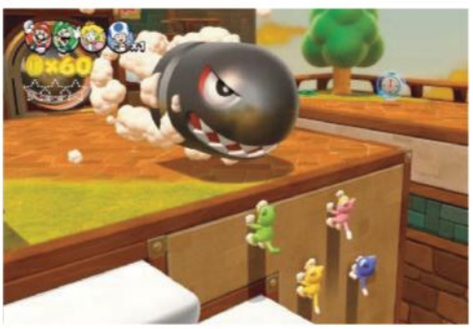
I first saw Mario in *Donkey Kong*, but the first time I really recognised Mario was in *Super Mario Bros* for the Nintendo. I was working at Epyx at the time and the testers were playing it. That year I bought NES consoles for all of my nieces and nephews.

Mario Kart 64 is probably my favourite *Mario* game because it led us to make *Crash Team Racing*, which I consider to be the most fun game I've ever worked on. I loved the slide mechanics and the random power-ups to rubber band the gameplay, helping out the players in the back. Really good level design also. I love Wario Stadium with the unintentional short cut at the beginning of the track where you could jump over the wall twice to get a really low lap time.

Right place right time and branding. Mario came to represent Nintendo as a mascot because of the success of *Super Mario Bros*. This led Nintendo to market based on Mario, which increased his popularity. Popularity is a power function, so once you have brand recognition, you have inertia to give you a leg up on the competition. That's why everyone makes sequels, why movie companies try to make blockbuster movies, and why indies and original material have a hard time breaking through. Just look at social gaming: *FarmVille*, which I now work on, is twice as popular as the next most popular game; there are a bunch of games around second place, followed by the 'long tail' of games after that. There can only be one super popular game at a time, and at some point *FarmVille*'s popularity will fade and another game will rise to fill its spot. *World Of Warcraft* is another example of this.

could launch Mario up into the air and even afford him a handy spray-powered speed boost. However, the device quickly became a bone of contention with many fans when they soon discovered that it hindered the responsive control of Mario, and made retrieving stars almost feel like Mario-endorsed GCSE physics exercises.

With *Mario Sunshine* failing to capture or stir up the same level of popularity as previous big-budget *Mario* titles, and it becoming increasing likely that the GameCube would become Nintendo's most unsuccessful console to date, outwardly it seemed that the once-infallible videogame giant was finally losing its grip on the market it formerly dominated, and Mario seemed to echo this sense of dispassion, appearing in a series of decent but uninspired sports sequels – *Mario Power Tennis*, *Mario Superstar Baseball* and *Mario Golf Toadstool Tour* – following a good but equally uninspired *Mario Kart* sequel with *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*. But just as it seemed Nintendo was becoming crestfallen by its fall from greatness, the Wii happened and changed its fortunes in a way that nobody could have predicted.



» [Wii U] *Super Mario 3D World* is the next adventure for the popular plumber and is due later this year. Here's hoping it's as fun as *Super Mario World*.

"This industry would be a far glummer place without Mario"

Space: the finest frontier

Both *Mario Galaxy* and *Mario Galaxy 2* stand as nigh-on flawless examples of expert game design, and rank among the best games in the *Mario* series. By making inspired and sensible use of the Wii's motion-sensor controls, Nintendo was able to recapture the keen sense of fun, exploration and enjoyment that dazzled gamers in *Mario 64*. Making use of the sphere-walking technology first demoed in *Super Mario 128*, Miyamoto and his team shot for the stars by opting to set the games in outer space, with levels taking the form of galaxies, all filled with individual planets and worlds to explore. Like *Mario 64* before it, the controls were also wonderfully implemented. Players could steer Mario in comfortable *Mario 64* fashion, but also aid him using the Wii Remote, which, through an on-screen reticule, could be used to suck up 'Star Bits' and launch Mario between planets. The *Galaxy* games also saw a return of the costume-style power-ups of old, including a bee costume that gave Mario the power of temporary flight and the first 3D iteration of the Fire Flower.

Complementing these two interstellar *Mario* adventures was another *Paper Mario* game, one of the best *Mario Kart* sequels to date in *Mario Kart Wii*, and a real return to the character's Famicom roots in the four-player platformer *New Super Mario Bros*, a game that brought simultaneous multiplayer back to the series for the first time since the original *Mario Bros*. And Nintendo's love for the past looks set to continue. To celebrate Mario's 'super' 25th anniversary, Nintendo released its *Super Mario Special Collection* for the Wii, a special edition version of *Super Mario All-Stars*.

Since then we've had the utterly sublime *Super Mario 3D Land* on Nintendo 3DS, the less impressive, but still enjoyable, *New Super Mario Bros 2* and an enjoyable Wii U entry in the shape of *New Super Mario Bros U*. Interestingly Mario's side-on antics aren't feeling as fresh as they once did and its clear that most of the imagination is now being placed in his 3D adventures. This is most obvious with the incoming release of *Super Mario 3D World*, which features an emphasis on multiplayer play, crazy looking environments and cute looking cat suits. Here's hoping it manages to capture the glory days of his early NES and SNES adventures.

STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

RETURN OF THE KING



- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **RELEASED:** 1993
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES



HISTORY

Regular forum visitors will no doubt be aware that I don't exactly have a lot of love for Capcom's seminal brawler. Don't get me wrong. I'm fully aware of its historical importance and realise that plenty of people still play it on a regular basis (last year's visit to the Retro Ball was all the proof you needed) but after witnessing the glorious choreography of *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike,* its older peer appeared to have nothing new to offer. How wrong I was…

Thanks to Capcom, and more importantly, Xbox Live arcade, I've been able to re-discover the joy of *Street Fighter II*, or more specifically, *Street Fighter II' Hyper Fighting* (or *Turbo* as it's known to us Brits). While the original *Street Fighter II* remains a slow, turgid experience (sorry guys, but it's true) *Turbo* gives the game a much-needed boost of speed and ensures that bouts are always satisfying to play. New costumes, extra moves and re-designed backdrops were just a few of the additions that Capcom included and I still have the cool metal tin that it was lovingly packaged in.

While later titles have presented us with more character choices than ever, ridiculous specials and the beauty that is parrying, there's still something immensely satisfying about a no-nonsense round of *Turbo*. There's no need to worry about pulling off double fireball motions, you won't moan over the cheapness of *Third Strike's* Chun-Li and Ken, you can just concentrate on mastering the good old fashioned art of beating the hell out of each other. Sure the character models look a little old-fashioned now and the animation has lost a lot of its slickness over the years, but even with these niggles (and that's all they really are) *Turbo's* gameplay remains resoundingly solid.

While it's no longer my 2D fighter of choice (that honour goes to the excellent digital port of *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*, I still enjoy the odd bout of fisticuffs on Capcom's excellent brawler whenever I have my SNES out (which is often). It remains one of the slickest 16-bit arcade conversions around, and time has done nothing to diminish that fact.




32102
KO
63
RYU

THE MAKING OF SUPER METROID





The Metroid series went in exciting new directions with the release of this 16-bit classic. Jonti Davies visits Nintendo HQ to scale the summit of the Metroid series with director Yoshio Sakamoto

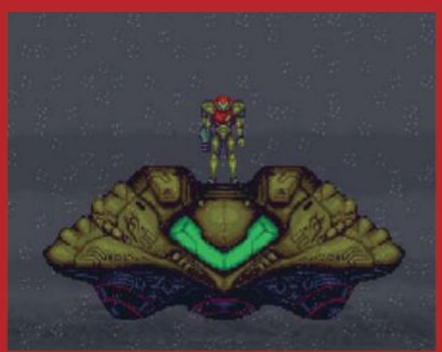
IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO

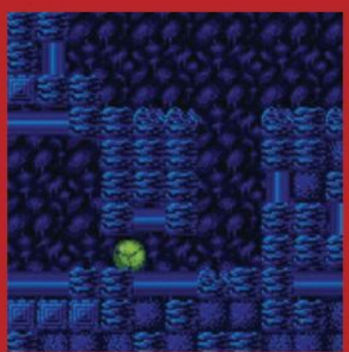
» **DEVELOPER:** R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

» **RELEASED:** 1994

» **GENRE:** ADVENTURE



» [SNES] Zebes was an atmospheric setting, with a variety of environments given life by the new SNES hardware.



» [SNES] The iconic Morph Ball has its roots in the lo-fi NES's inability to convincingly animate a crawling Samus.



» Sakamoto also directed *Metroid Fusion* and *Zero Mission*.

Heading back up to ground level as I leave the immaculate subway at Jujo Station in the south of Kyoto, I walk through this remarkably unremarkable suburb until I see the big white block that houses Nintendo's contemporary headquarters. The gates to NCL are manned by two portly, middle-aged guards who seem to project a faintly threatening presence, which is comically undone as I notice, behind them, in the back of their little booth, a stash of NCL-manufactured toy guns apparently left over from the Seventies and a selection of Nintendo character plushes from the Famicom era. This may not be the original Nintendo HQ site, but it clearly retains the company's history like a hoarding retro gamer hangs on to loose carts.

Inside, beyond the pristine lawns and shiny entrance, I enter a marble-floored, austere world whose foyer is staffed by painfully polite and correctly spoken Nintendo officials. Eventually I'm led into a meeting room on the ground floor, where I sip the o-cha kindly provided by the demure NCL woman as I wait – and slightly nervously revise my notes and cue my Dictaphone – until a smiling, ponytailed artist type arrives and immediately makes his introduction. This is Yoshio Sakamoto, producer of *Super Metroid* back in the early Nineties and still an integral Nintendo developer today. "Hajimemashite. Yoroshiku onegai shimasu."

Sakamoto has brought with him a small booklet containing an overview of *Super Metroid* to aid his memory – the game was completed 15 years ago, but the *Metroid* legacy stretches back two decades – as we chat.

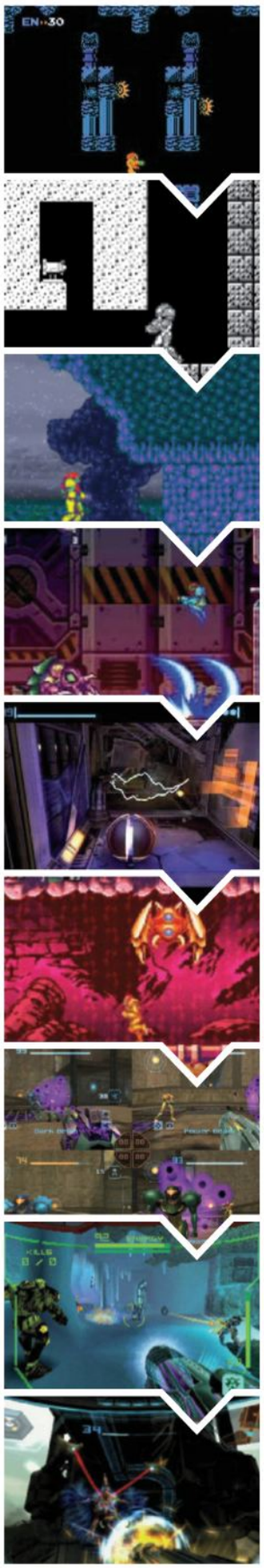
"To start with, there was the Famicom *Metroid* game," he recalls. Sakamoto worked on that first *Metroid* adventure, and its relevance to *Super Metroid* is particularly important because of the unchanging core concept of the 2D *Metroid* games; a core that was formed in said Famicom Disk System original of 1986.

"My boss [producer Makoto Kanoh] told me that *Metroid* was really popular in North America, so he encouraged me to produce a new *Metroid* game with the high-quality graphics that were becoming possible thanks to the Super Famicom. Of course I said, 'Yes, I'd like to try doing that.' The game design and concept had already been established before *Metroid II* was produced for the Game Boy," Sakamoto explains. "When it came to making another sequel, this time for the Super Famicom, we really wanted to see how far we could push the SFC to generate greater power of expression and enhance the appearance of the game world, all while working with a basically unchanged concept. That was our initial motivation as far as *Super Metroid* was concerned: to build on the expressiveness of *Metroid II* and achieve greater presence, something closer to a reality."

Sakamoto had nothing to do with the development of *Metroid II* – at the time his services were required elsewhere within NCL – yet that sophomore title in part shaped the plan for *Super Metroid*: "As the last scene depicted Baby Metroid being born right in front of Samus's eyes… well… there's no real explanation for that in the course of the games, but that scene was another source of incentive for us in that we wanted to follow on from that ending, linking *Metroid II* with *Super Metroid*. We were determined to keep the same world-view and maintain the continuity of the story."

Aside from the basic formula of play that was set in motion by *Metroid*,

Series highlights



Metroid
(FDS/NES/GBA – 1986)

The *Metroid* series was born on disk, not cartridge. It began life as this 1986-vintage Famicom Disk System title before migrating to the silicon of NES carts for consumption in the West. Videogames' first internationally famous heroine was born here. (An emulated version can be found in the GameCube release of *Metroid Prime*.)

Metroid II: Return Of Samus
(Game Boy – 1992)

This monochrome curio transported Samus to the Metroid homeworld of SR388, its dramatic finale providing Sakamoto and team with a bridge into the events of *Super Metroid*. It may not be as pretty as its relatives, but *Return Of Samus* remains an essential experience for the family's admirers.

Super Metroid
(SNES – 1994)

Arguably the finest game in the *Metroid* series, this 16-bit creation brought 2D adventure gaming to a new level of sophistication. *Super Metroid*'s pacing and world design are by all measures perfect, and there are so many aspects to explore here that the game retains its unique allure 15 years on.

Metroid Fusion
(GBA – 2002)

Taking the *Super Metroid* template into the 21st Century, and again with Yoshio Sakamoto at the creative helm, *Metroid Fusion* found Samus once more facing the destruction of a game world. Only this time Samus was the knowing perpetrator.

Metroid Prime
(GameCube – 2002)

Retro Studios' first-person adventure spin on the *Metroid* template sold 1.5 million copies in the United States alone, yet it simultaneously pushed Samus Aran away from Japanese sensibilities, guaranteeing a future of Western success at the cost of *Metroid*'s Japanese heritage. *Prime*'s unusual perspective and restrained style of first-person play carved out a niche for Samus in the next generation, cleverly sidestepping the FPS genre to find new ground.

Metroid: Zero Mission
(GBA – 2004)

Zero Mission's retelling of the first *Metroid* game brought with it a *Fusion*-standard graphical upgrade. By this stage Samus's popularity in her homeland was at an all-time low, and sales didn't reach six figures in Japan; a shame, as *Zero Mission* was even better than the FDS original.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes
(GameCube – 2004)

The first *Metroid* game to feature a multiplayer mode, although its inclusion was perhaps ill-advised, as it failed to really add anything of worth to the traditional single-player adventure. *Echoes*' greatest successes were in translating more of Samus's abilities to a 3D context.

Metroid Prime: Hunters
(DS – 2006)

Developed by NST, the outfit behind titles such as *Ridge Racer 64* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm*, *Hunters* was one of the better first-person DS games, with a multiplayer mode that felt more natural than that of *Echoes*. However, compared with joypad-controlled *Metroid* predecessors, *Hunters*' touch-screen controls resulted in a slightly lower-than-average level of overall satisfaction.

Metroid Prime 3: Corruption
(Wii – 2007)

The final release in the *Prime* trilogy effectively brought the modern *Metroid* experience closer in line with the FPS genre, combining Remote-directed shooting and relentless action.



» [SNES] *Super Metroid* brought with it *Metroid II*'s battery saves, a godsend after the first game's password system.

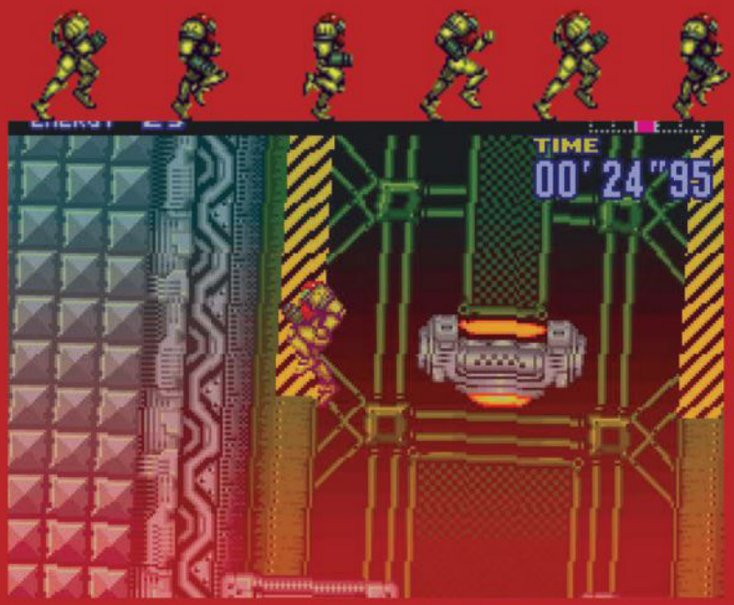
the code on that million-selling disk also plotted the aesthetic direction of the series. I suggest to Sakamoto-san that *Super Metroid* and the *Metroid* games in general don't look like 'typical' NCL games and I ask him why that might be. He sips his tea and then replies: "I think the film *Alien* had a huge influence on the production of the first *Metroid* game. All of the team members were affected by HR Giger's design work, and I think they were aware that such designs would be a good match for the *Metroid* world we had already put in place. To be honest, I've never really been clear on what is or isn't the 'Nintendo look', but as far as we were concerned, we were just projecting another image from within Nintendo – another face of Nintendo, if you like. But yes, it's a science-fiction game, so…"

Other than the artistic influence of Necronom, Sakamoto reckons that numerous games affected the style of *Super Metroid* – "I can't list them… There are just too many of them" – although he counters this by highlighting the experimental side of his team's early work: "For the prototype stage of *Super Metroid*'s development we just had a few Intelligent Systems programming staff, myself, and another [in-house] Nintendo designer. We examined what was possible in the game, and as the core *Metroid* system was already in place we considered how we could make the game easier to play, what new ideas we could incorporate, and so on… Then we drafted in lots of other NCL and IntSys developers once we got beyond that stage and into the proper work."

There has always been a complex yet mutually beneficial relationship between Nintendo, then based in Higashiyama (to the northeast of the current Minami location), and Intelligent Systems, constantly situated in the eastern Kyoto ward of Higashiyama. Sakamoto refers to the team as "IntSys" and says that it had been helping Nintendo with the *Metroid* series since the initial FDS game, "as a second-party developer". While it's fair to say that the game design and play-testing abilities of NCL's in-house staff have always been some of the world's best, Intelligent Systems' developers were on hand to provide indispensable technical know-how, particularly focused on the hardware side of things.

"IntSys has always been very capable with hardware," Sakamoto adds, "so during the experimental stage we told the IntSys programmers what kinds of things we wanted to do and verified what in reality could be done. We'd been well prepared for the move to the Super Famicom hardware, so we had some idea of what to expect before we went into it; which features we should use, and how. I think it was good that we went through the prototype stage because it gave us a base onto which the post-

"The nap room wasn't being cleaned at all. One morning staff woke us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo"





» [SNES] The open-ended gameplay meant that *Super Metroid* has become popular for speed runs.





» [SNES] *Super Metroid* used the full range of special effects available to the SNES for its bosses and environments.

experimental stage staffers could easily begin their work. At the time, the SFC was reputed to be difficult to develop for. Depending on how you partitioned the Super Famicom's video RAM, which looked after the sorting of image information, the scope of possibilities would change wildly. Knowing that you could diminish the VRAM's potential by poor partitioning was useful information, because it meant we could think about how certain things could or couldn't be achieved, and how we could work around those limitations. As we were migrating from the Famicom to Super Famicom, really everyone – not just Nintendo but other developers too – seemed to be having fun testing the feature set of the new hardware. That went for us, too: I remember often thinking, 'Oh, I had no idea we could even do this!' The graphics and sound were fantastic, but we were still driven by wanting to [not] be outdone by the arcade games of the time."

To a man, the developers supplied by IntSys to work on *Super Metroid* were all programmers. In spite of the various backgrounds of the *Super Metroid* team, there was apparently no NCL-IntSys rivalry; no factions, just harmony and productive co-operation. Key team members from the Nintendo side included Makoto Kanoh, the producer, the guy who instigated the project; my interviewee, Yoshio Sakamoto, who was the director in charge of game design; and Tomomi Yamane, who was the figure Sakamoto regards as having been the 'main' designer: "He was very skilled and was particularly interested in the hardware stuff, consulting with the IntSys people as to what kind of images could be displayed."

Even though the team's objective was to build on the success of *Metroid* and *Metroid II*, only three of the original *Metroid* team, including Sakamoto himself, worked on *Super Metroid*: "The rest of the [NCL side] was made up of young trainee developers," he recalls. "Of course young people can be quite impertinent – and those on the *Super Metroid* team certainly were – but I think that's quite important in a way. These young people had enough about them to help us a lot. There were many different personalities in the *Super Metroid* team, which was a good thing. It was a harsh development environment, so I'm sure that some of the staff didn't enjoy the work, but generally the team was full of the 'Let's go for it!' spirit. I think that was partly because of the timing as well, what with the Super Famicom pushing everything to the next level."

The "next level" wasn't merely the notion of advanced graphics and sound: it was also a matter of the expansion and improvement of level design. However, Sakamoto and team were reluctant to drag *Super Metroid* into the realm of storytelling methods utilised by RPGs and other adventure games. "We really didn't want to explain things to the player using too many words," Sakamoto states. "We just wanted to let them play and be able to work things out for themselves. For example, say there's a mechanism where you need to climb up a ladder and place a bomb there in order to advance, as one component in the solution of a [gameplay] riddle; if that was all you needed to do in order to get through to the next area, you'd miss all of the other mechanisms we'd put in place and wouldn't even realise that certain parts of the game existed. We wanted players to explore everything we'd made and then move on. That's why we designed the maps in such a way that the player couldn't escape without exploration, or in such a way that the player would end up back at a starting point before advancing. The player would be cornered/driven and would eventually be forced to stop and say, 'Right, how should I think about this area?' That's the essential point of *Super Metroid*'s map design. Not using words meant

THE MAKING OF

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

DONKEY KONG JR
SYSTEM: ARCADE, FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM/NES, ETC
YEAR: 1982

KID ICARUS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986

METROID
SYSTEM: FDS/NES, GBA
YEAR: 1986



that the player had to 'feel' his/her way through the game – and that's how we wanted it to be. When they discovered something new – a new item or new location – we wanted the player to feel that he/she had made that discovery independently, without help from the game."

R&D1 went to great pains to achieve the fine balance seen in *Super Metroid*'s item locations, puzzles, boss encounters, and in Samus's acquired abilities and inventory use. It wasn't simply the case that everything fell into position at the first attempt at design either, as Sakamoto reveals: "In a stage following on from an area where the player made lots of discoveries, we'd hold back from pushing the player too far in order to avoid repetition. Balance between difficulty level and player discoveries was crucial. We wanted to avoid creating an on-rails experience – we wanted the player to feel free. But it was incredibly difficult to get that balancing act right. We'd been designing levels in this way since the first game, so we had a lot of experience but we still needed to experiment and build and rebuild."

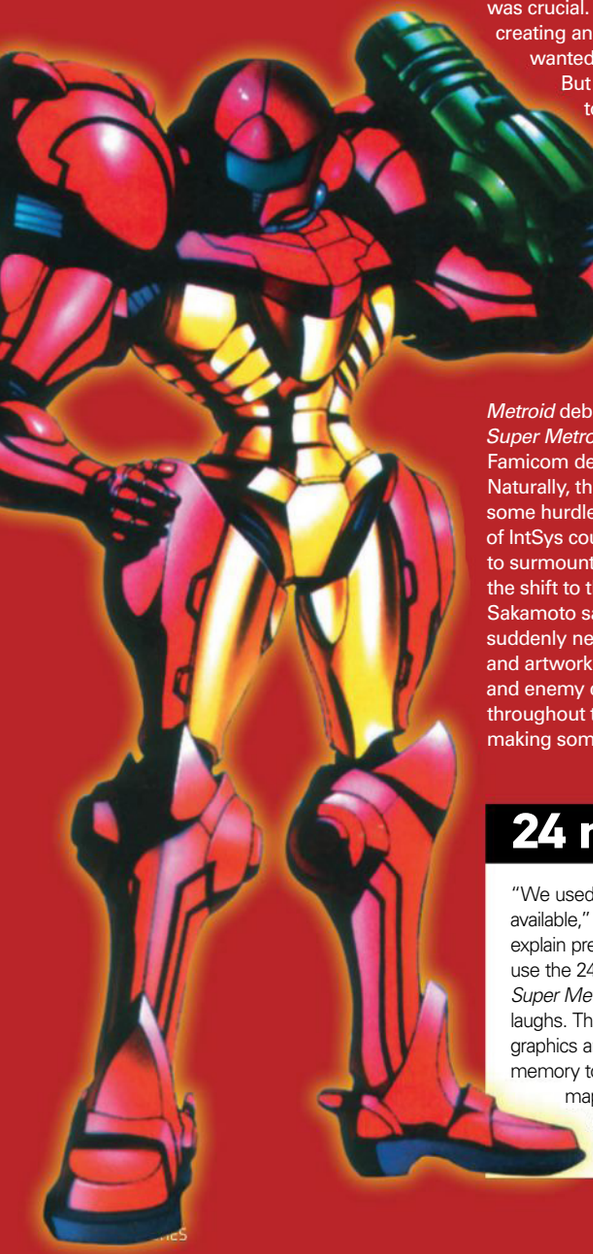
As well as being a *Metroid* debut for most of the team, *Super Metroid* marked the Super Famicom debut for all concerned. Naturally, this step up presented some hurdles that even the advice of IntSys couldn't equip the team to surmount. "One problem with the shift to the Super Famicom," Sakamoto says, "was that it meant we suddenly needed a lot more sprites and artwork, so we shared the map and enemy design responsibilities throughout the team, with everyone making some input in those areas. But then doing that resulted in a complete mishmash of styles because of each designer's individual preference, so in the end I had to ask Yamane to retouch everything that had been submitted, bringing it all together as one consistent design."

Remarkably, there was no friction within the team even during the frenzied last stage of development, although there was something of a bad smell: "During the final six months of development I didn't know where I lived any more; the Nintendo building – not here, but the old place [in Higashiyama] – became like a boarding house for the *Super Metroid* team," Sakamoto grins. "It got to the stage where I really don't remember going home at all! There was a nap room where it was okay to sleep, but sometimes it was full [of sleeping, overworked *Super Metroid* staff] – those were the worst times, when I wanted to sleep but couldn't, and I didn't have time to go home! There were always between ten and fifteen of us in the office through the night, so we had to take naps in turns. The nap room wasn't being cleaned or looked after at all, because we were always using it; one morning staff from another area came to wake us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo. Another Nintendo employee put a room freshener in the nap room, but that only made the place pong even worse. Everyone in Nintendo gave us funny looks," Sakamoto laughs. "It's quite sad having only these kinds of memories!"

> **"We didn't want to explain things to the player. We wanted to let them be able to work things out for themselves"**

Our talk soon takes a turn from development room stench to the wrath of a Nintendo demigod: Gunpei Yokoi. In his early 50s at the time of *Super Metroid*'s production, Yokoi was the game's general project manager but did not exercise any hands-on control. Sakamoto remembers how his superior viewed *Super Metroid*: "Yokoi-san, who at the time was my section chief and who always had fresh ideas, was always angry when he saw us all completely absorbed and working crazy overtime on *Super Metroid*. He came in and said, 'Are you lot trying to produce a work of art or something?' [Laughs] But this was an epic and we were already way past our deadline, and it seemed we were getting progressively further from our objectives – Yokoi-san was becoming angrier with us day by day during that period. We weren't aware of it, but Kanoh was given a warning by Yokoi-san. Although he was really unhappy with us, and even though he wasn't the type to dish out praise, Yokoi-san was constantly playing *Super Metroid* once we'd finished it – he was hooked. He was playing it so much that I wondered what he was up to. [Laughs] When other developers brought their action games to Nintendo, he'd always compare them with *Super Metroid* and invariably ended up recommending the third-party developer to 'go away and play *Super Metroid*'. That's how fond he was of our game. I suppose this is a better memory than the smelly nap room anecdote," Sakamoto laughs.

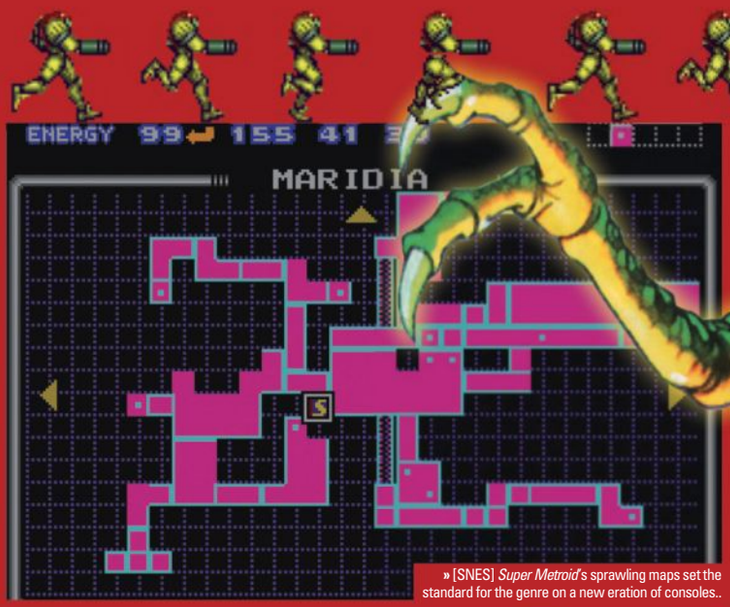
"*Super Metroid* was released in '94," he continues, "and development had taken us between two and three years. I don't know how it was perceived throughout the company, but the timing was such that all teams were focused on putting out lots of new SFC games, so there was obviously some expectation that we deliver with *Super Metroid*. We definitely had a lot of support and understanding of the game's concept from people related with the project, and that helped to ensure that we did a good job." Which, as everyone who has played the classic game will quickly attest, is a monumental understatement indeed.



24 megabits, 7 modes

"We used all seven of the hardware modes available," Sakamoto tells me, although he doesn't explain precisely what that means. And how did you use the 24-meg cartridge that ended up housing *Super Metroid*, I ask? "I can't remember!" Sakamoto laughs. There's a pause. "We achieved wonderful graphics and sound by dedicating most of the memory to those features. Yes. Oh, and the game's maps were also quite large, I think. We made good, balanced use of the 24 megabits, anyway – that much I know for sure."

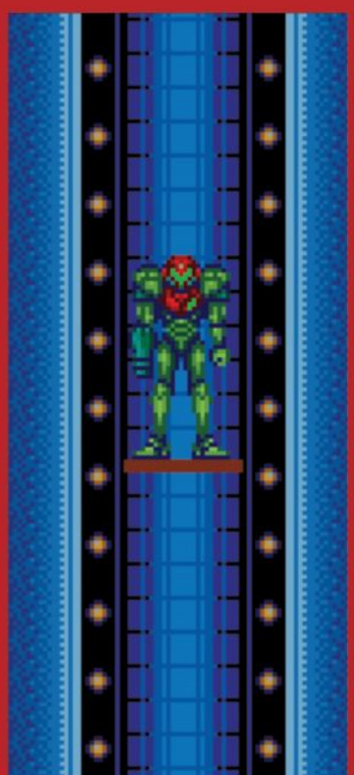




» [SNES] *Super Metroid*'s sprawling maps set the standard for the genre on a new eration of consoles..



» [SNES] The last-minute escape from the self-destructing space station has become a familiar opening for *Metroid* games.



» [SNES] The way in which new abilities open up new areas has been often copied since *Super Metroid*'s release.





The big bosses

Kraid
This first major boss character is literally a monster: he probably missed out on a role in the Chewits adverts purely because he was overqualified. Kraid's weak point is his gob, although he uses his whole being to launch quasi-organic thorns and fireballs in Samus' direction.

Phantoon
A good example of the Super Famicom hardware's transparency effects, Phantoon at times appears to be an apparition; this boss's trick is to flit between protected translucency and a devastatingly powerful solid state, and he likes to launch endless rounds of flaming blue orbs.

Draygon
This yellow-bellied, oversized crustacean is more than just a simple typo. Draygon is a mean swimmer, and its weak points are protected by the shell of a giant lobster. Slightly perversely, *Super Metroid* encourages you to vanquish Draygon by electrocuting it until its flesh turns purple.

Ridley
An homage – in name alone, obviously – to *Alien* director Ridley Scott, whose film was a major inspiration to the series, this senior Space Pirate appears once at the start of *Super Metroid* and again, in more powerful – yet paradoxically more vulnerable – form, towards the end of the game.

Mother Brain
The enigmatic final boss of *Super Metroid* is essentially a lump of deskulled brain. However, Mother Brain protects itself with dynamic weapons and the glass casing of a robo-suit, and when that fails, it connects to the neck of a bio-mechanical bodysuit. Afterwards, Samus again has to run for her life.

THE CLASSIC GAME

CONTRA III
THE ALIEN WARS

It's without doubt one of the greatest Super Nintendo games of all time, one of the best games in the *Contra* series, and also one of the finest run-and-gun games ever. Oh, and did we mention that it's one of the best games ever too? That it's taken us 89 issues to finally give *Contra III* a classic game analysis is somewhat strange, but the reason lies in the fact that the game is so exceptional that we just assumed we already had. A masterclass in game pacing, set pieces and basically just great level design, from the very minute you start *Contra III* to the sweaty, jubilation-filled second you finally beat it on the hardest setting and see the game's ending, the action is relentless, the challenge high and the gameplay intense. The year is 2636, and Stuart Hunt is helping two commandos, Sully and Jimbo, win an epic alien war.

THE ARMOURY



Machine gun
The default weapon in the game. It's pretty powerful and really quite effective at taking out much that the game throws at you.



Laser
As laser-based weapons do, this fires a concentrated line of powerful radiation. It's highly powerful, but using it requires a good aim.



Spread gun
Though the weakest weapon in the game, the spread gun makes short work of enemies attacking from different heights.



Crush missiles
Blue in colour, these are the most powerful weapons in the game. They explode on contact, and are really effective against bosses.



Flamethrower
The flamethrower is an effective close-quarters combat tool that is great for taking down bosses and cindering weak spots.



Homing missiles
Moderately powerful homing missiles will hunt enemies down. It's a really effective weapon against the airborne aliens.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



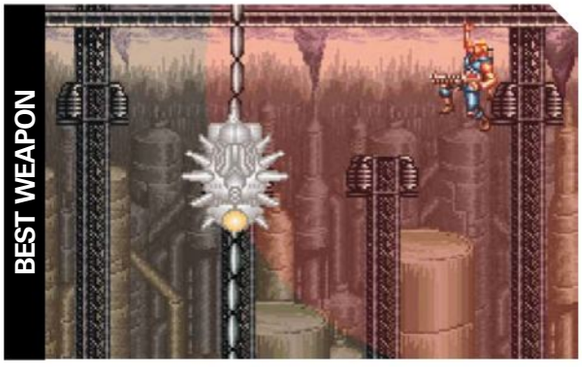
Contra just got better

The original *Contra* reinvented the run-and-gun genre, introducing many elements that countless games adopted. The follow-ups prior to *Contra III* offered a decent helping of action, but they didn't measure up to the original. *Contra III*, however, marked a giant leap forward. It was everything you would expect from a *Contra* game, but with bigger weapons, bigger explosions, bigger bosses, a new post-apocalyptic setting and a motorcycle level. Set piece after set piece, the game was a tour de force of imagination, deft level design and special effects that hasn't aged a single day.



Start as you mean to end

With so many memorable moments in *Contra III*, picking just one was impossible. As the opening stage is a great example of how to grab a teenager's attention and make them part with birthday money, we had to mention it. Within the first few minutes you're gunning down aliens and mutant dogs, hopping into a tank to flatten foes, sampling nearly all of the weapons in the game, dodging a plane as it bombs the city, jumping through the flaming ruins while taking out a wave of winged aliens and finally facing off against a giant, bullet-spewing alien tortoise. It's one of the best opening levels of any videogame.



Smart bomb

Many fans will have their favourite weapon. Some love the laser. Others will like the weaker but lovely spread gun, as it makes killing foes an absolute breeze. There are others who will like the flamethrower, as it's great for when you get up close. Therefore, picking a best weapon is a bit of a thankless endeavour, and one we chickened out of by virtue of us going with the smart bomb. It might look like a metal turnip, but release it into the game's atmosphere and see the screen turn hazy, killing grunts with ease and knocking a large chunk off the energy of the game's bosses.



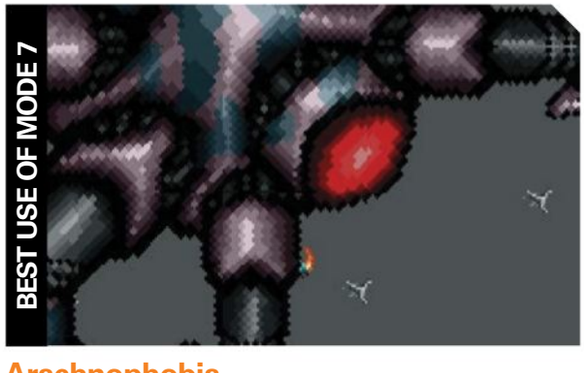
The massive Terminator

There really was only one boss we could highlight here. And typical of memorable 16-bit bosses, it is something that didn't exactly err on the side of caution as far as copyright was concerned. The giant T-800-alike that rips through the level's wall at the end of the third stage is a tricky one. First, you see his claws pierce the wall, pulling it apart as if it was made of tinfoil, before seeing his beaming red eyes glowing in the darkness. The beast then emerges, firing lasers from its eyes, lobbing bombs into the playing field and breathing fire too. The only thing it doesn't do is ride a motorcycle and shoot up a police station.



Motorcycle

Given that there are so many great action set pieces in *Contra III*, we had to give a mention to another of its fantastic levels. The motorcycle stage deserves a look in, as it's basically just one giant action set piece. The stage begins with the player astride a 2636 era Ducati, blasting flying aliens before a giant frigate appears, its undercarriage primed with heavy ordnance. Survive this vicious gauntlet and the ship takes to the air, you chasing after it. This leads on to the most insane bit in the entire game: blasting the ship's glowing arse while hopping between missiles being fired at it.



Arachnophobia

From the map in *A Link To The Past* to pseudo-3D like *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*, the cream of early Super Nintendo games used the console's Mode 7 technique to show off the power of the console, and *Contra III* was no different, proving a great showcase of the versatility of the effect. It was used to create dazzling explosions, two top-down levels, and also several bosses. The first Mode 7 boss is a large robotic spider that scuttles along the floor before jumping into the air, scaling bigger and filling the screen before disappearing, and then making a quick descent in a bid to crush Sully and Jimbo.





IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SUPER NINTENDO
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

What the press said... ages ago



Mean Machines 95%
Anyone who doubts the abilities of the Super NES should take a look at this – it's unbelievable! The graphics, sounds, special effects and varied, highly addictive gameplay are all absolutely outstanding.

What we think

Standing alongside *Gunstar Heroes* and *Metal Slug*, *Contra III* is the pinnacle of run-and-gun gaming, and has still yet to be bettered. It's an outstanding game.



MODE 7 HEAVEN

We look back at some of the best and lesser-known examples of Mode 7, the famous graphics mode that became a hallmark for many early Super Nintendo releases and helped elevate Nintendo gaming during the Nineties

Contra III: The Alien Wars



Best Mode 7 moment: The opening stage
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The foremost thing to remember about SNES Mode 7 is that its powers are ineffective on game sprites. However, Mode 7 can rotate and increase the size of background images to give the impression they're animated; to create a 'Mode 7 sprite' (a term we've just made up but feel is befitting). Developers are also able to go a step further by adding moving parts made of sprites to really mess with our heads. For two really good examples of this technique in action look no further than the epic first stage of *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, which is packed with Mode 7 moments. The low-flying plane that turns up midway through the game's first stage forms part of a background layer and is animated using Mode 7 (as it comes closer to the screen its size increases and its wings bank slightly). However, the bombs that it drops are sprites. Similarly, the body, neck and head of the turtle boss that awaits at the end of the stage also sits in the background, while the bullets it fires and moving legs are sprites. These are two of the best examples of Mode 7 being used by a developer to create believable animated objects in games.

Chrono Trigger

Best Mode 7 moment: The crazy racing mini-game
Year: 1995
Publisher: Squaresoft
Developer: In-house

There are many examples of Mode 7 being put to good use in Square's epic time-travelling RPG *Chrono Trigger*, but our favourite is the Jetbike mini-game found in the Beyond The Ruins future chapter. While most racing games use Mode 7 to generate into-the-screen tracks, *Chrono Trigger* shows the effect being put to use in a side-on racing scenario – although the shoulder buttons allow you to rotate the camera. The fun and challenging mini-game proved so popular among fans that Square later released a standalone digital version for the Sattellaview titled *Chrono Trigger: Jet Bike Special*.





Demon's Crest

Best Mode 7 moment: Getting around
Year: 1994
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house

Demon's Crest is a superb action/platformer that is every bit as atmospheric and challenging as its famous cousin *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. The third part of the excellent *Gargoyle's Quest* series, *Demon's Crest* made this list purely for its neat world map, which, thanks to some Mode 7 magic, allowed you to navigate and land on it *Pilotwings* fashion to replay stages.

Super Castlevania IV

Best Mode 7 moment: Fighting Koronot
Year: 1991
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The nightmare world of *Castlevania* is the perfect environment for Mode 7 to do its thing, and Konami put it to great use in *Super Castlevania IV*. Mode 7 can be seen in the game's map screen, its rotating stages, those cool rocking chandeliers on Stage 5 and even in some of its more memorable bosses. And this brings us rather nicely to our favourite Mode 7 moment in the game – the stone golem boss Koronot. Fought at the end of stage four, every time you hit him with the Vampire Killer he shrinks in size and causes the sky to hail stones. That is until you make that final killer blow and he expands to fill the entire screen.



Super Mario Kart

Best Mode 7 moment:
Rainbow Road
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Though *F-Zero* was the first game to show the exhilarating things Mode 7 could bring to racing games, it was clear there was room for refinement. *F-Zero*'s glitzy, neon-coloured racer is certainly fast and pretty, but its racing gets shown up for being shallow when compared to *Super Mario Kart*. *Super Mario Kart* is *F-Zero* but with more intricate tracks, modes and sprites (characters, weapons, power-ups and annoying flat moles). It raised the bar of Mode 7 application, but it also spawned Nintendo's most successful-ever racing franchise. It would also be remiss of us to not mention that Mode 7 marks the first time the bright, vibrant and colourful world of the *Mario* franchise was presented in a way resembling believable 3D. That it was also immensely playable didn't do much to hurt its success either.





We expose blatant Super Mario Kart copycarts

Kat's Run



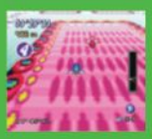
This obscure racer plays like a *Gran Turismo* take on *Super Mario Kart*. After picking your driver from the ten spiky-haired racers on offer, you select your vehicle and then compete in street races. Because *Kat's Run* is grounded in reality both visually and track-wise it suffers. With dull circuits and visuals, it is unfortunately one of the least impressive Mode 7 racers on Super Nintendo.

SD F-1 Grand Prix

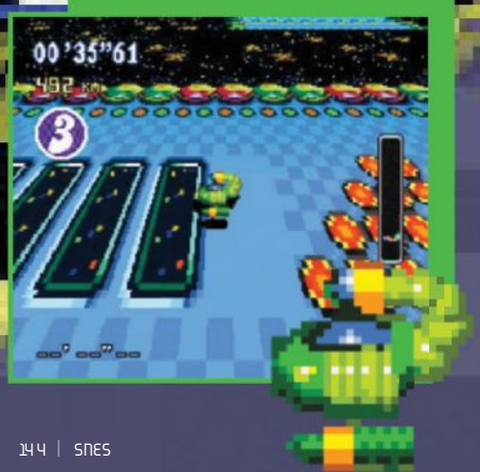


The most blatant *Super Mario Kart* clone ever produced, *SD F-1 Grand Prix* stars a cast of cuddly super deformed (SD) critters and a few tracks which ape those in Nintendo's racer. As it sticks so close to the *Mario Kart* template it's unsurprising it's a decent racer. The irony though is that it's part of an established racing franchise (Video System's *F1 Grand Prix*) that predates *Super Mario Kart*. One of the more impressive Mode 7 racers.

Uchuu Race: Astro Go! Go!



The colourful eye-bursting result of what happens when you mix two parts *F-Zero* with one part *Super Mario Kart*, *Uchuu Race* is a bright, cutesy cartoonish future racer. The game's most notable thing is that you can turn your craft 360 degrees. As a result, the controls can feel erratic initially and make the more challenging pinball-style obstacle-packed stages quite frustrating. Overall though, it's a decent if imitative racer.





Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time

Best Mode 7 moment: Foot Soldier fling
Year: 1992
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house

The most vivid Mode 7 scenes are often those that took us by surprise. Those moments we'd be sat playing game X and then all of a sudden a cool Mode 7 trick would materialize from out of nowhere. Though this SNES port features a great Mode 7 recreation of the arcade game's thrilling hoverboard stage, it's the Foot Soldier-towards-camera fling that stuck in our minds most. Capturing the slapstick nature of the cartoon perfectly, seeing it never gets boring. In fact, we'd even go so far as to say it's a frontrunner for the best Mode 7 moment ever.

Exhaust Heat

Best Mode 7 moment: Pitting
Year: 1992
Publisher: Seta Corporation
Developer: In-house

Exhaust Heat is a very different racer to Nintendo's more famous Mode 7 offerings. Its charm and speed are slow coming, with its tracks (based on real circuits) feeling a bit empty by comparison and exhilarating racing only arriving once you've enough money to upgrade your car. But be patient, and you'll find that *Exhaust Heat* is a great racer with some subtle sim elements. Wonderfully presented throughout, our standout Mode 7 moment occurs when you enter a pit and the camera seamlessly rotates to the side of your car.





Run Saber

Best Mode 7 moment: Plane battle
Year: 1993
Publisher: Atlus Co.
Developer: Horisoft

Often dubbed as the *Super Nintendo Strider*, owing to starring two lithe plasma sword-waving heroes able to cling to walls and do fancy somersaults, *Run Saber* is an imitative but entertaining action game. Mode 7 was often used by developers as a way to insert something memorable to boss encounters, and this is demonstrated by *Run Saber*'s first boss. A battle that takes place in the sky, you have to fight a disembodied biomechanical Medusa head while clinging desperately to an F-14 Tomcat that loops in the air.

ActRaiser

Best Mode 7 moment: World map
Year: 1990
Publisher: Enix Corporation
Developer: Quintet

Anyone who has played this unusual city building hack-and-slash marriage will attest that its title screen really utilises Mode 7. Yes, it's just a spinning word, but it grabs your attention. For us though, the best Mode 7 moment has to be when you enter a new stage. Starting from high up in your heavenly hub palace, you see the camera spiral towards the overworld map and home in on the level.



HyperZone

Best Mode 7 moment: First stage
Year: 1991
Publisher: HAL Laboratory
Developer: In-house

HyperZone was an early release for the console and arrived the very same month as the console's US release. Playing like a lovely sounding cross between *F-Zero* and *Space Harrier*, you steer a tubby spaceship through a series of eight colourful Mode 7-created courses, shooting unimaginative enemies until you come up against a slightly less unimaginative looking boss. The stages tracks also have strict lanes to follow, and straying from them causes your ship take damage *F-Zero*-style. While this does help to add a subtle racing feel to the shooting, there's not much fun or variety in *HyperZone*. It's a clear case of Mode 7 over substance – thankfully, and surprisingly, a road the majority of Mode 7 games chose not to follow.





Super Mario World

Best Mode 7 moment: Fighting Bowser
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

After revisiting *Mario*'s epic 16-bit adventure to write this feature we were surprised to discover that there weren't as many instances of Mode 7 being utilised as we remember. It's mostly used in the boss fights, where it can be seen creating the see-sawing platform you fight Iggy Koopa on and helping Morton Koopa JR. scale the inner walls of his castle. Nintendo saved the best example for last though, with a memorable final battle against Bowser that saw him dropping fireballs, enemies and giant cannonballs from inside a Dr. Robotnik-esque clown-faced flying machine. Breaking from his attack sequences to steer it backwards and then fly it towards the camera until that silly, smug clown face filled the entire screen, if that didn't motivate players into finishing the fight nothing would…Well maybe the added sight of seeing Princess Toadstool appear from inside the device to do her damsel-in-distress bit.

Super Star Wars – The Empire Strikes Back

Best Mode 7 moment: Battle of Hoth
Year: 1993
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: Sculptured Software

The Battle of Hoth has been restaged in videogames numerous times, and most have provided great set-piece moments – or in the case of the 2600 an entire game. This epic Mode 7 stage was the most faithful recreation of the epic snow fight. With some stunning undulating Hoth terra firma to fly over, the mission tasks you with destroying a set number of varied targets, ranging from Probe Droids to AT-ATs. The stage then gets really awesome when it introduces AT-AT Walkers to the fight and allows you to take them down by cable-tying their legs together and causing them to trip over and kiss the snow.



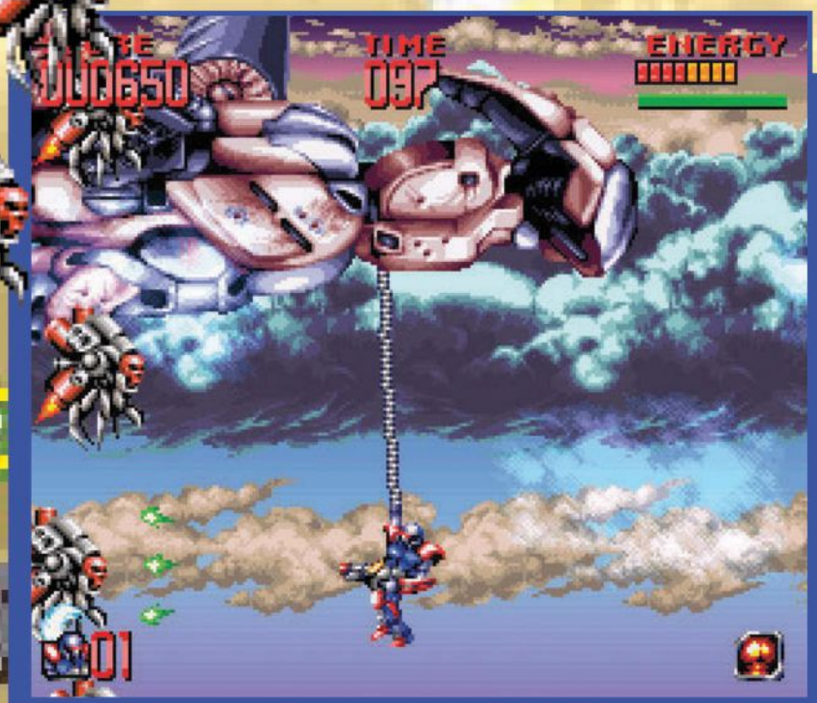
Super Soccer

Best Mode 7 moment: Kick-off
Year: 1992
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Human Entertainment

While *Super Tennis* used Mode 7 in a subtle way – it was used on its intro screen and as a way to circle the camera around the court when players swapped ends, *Super Soccer* was much more blatant in its usage. The impressive looking but fidgety feeling football pitch certainly brought a few issues; the action felt a little sluggish, it wasn't always easy to judge passes and tackles, and for one half of the match you were running up a pitch you couldn't actually see. However, the jaunty graphics and unique perspective still won you over. *Super Soccer* isn't the greatest football game, but it certainly captures the fun nature of the sport, especially in multiplayer.







Super Turrican 2



Best Mode 7 moment: Worm boss
Year: 1995
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Factor 5

Super Turrican 2 really puts the Super Nintendo through its paces. Though it doesn't have the *Metroid* feel of the 8-bit original, it's a real showcase of fancy Super Nintendo visual effects, and provides no shortage of great Mode 7 moments. Our choice picks include the giant Mode 7 Sarlacc-style worm boss that you have to fight from inside its gaping mouth, the superb robotic spider boss, and the neat into-the-screen racing/shooter sections. Developed by Factor 5, who is probably most well-known for the *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* series of Nintendo games, it's a truly fantastic shooter with visuals, imagination and set-piece moments that easily meet those high points of *Contra 3*, and Chris Hueslbeck's soundtrack is brilliant too. A polished and sensational shooter, it's just a shame that copies go for so much money these days.

F-Zero



Best Mode 7 moment: First track
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

While *F-Zero* may not be the most deep racing experience, if seen as Nintendo trying to show that its new console could easily handle an arcade-style racing game then it certainly achieves its goal. Said to be loosely connected to the obscure NES racer *Mach Rider*, which started its life as a plastic toy bike back when Nintendo was a toy maker, *F-Zero* was a perfect showcase for what the Mode 7 could do. Not only was *F-Zero* a launch game for the console but it was also the first game to utilise Mode 7, which here is used to create its stunning pseudo 3D tracks. Allowing the racing to feel incredibly fast and smooth as it wasn't pushing around intricate track and level designs – something which has remained a speed over detail hallmark for the series, nothing touched it in terms of exhilaration and visuals. It even left some arcade games eating its dust.







On The Ball



Best Mode 7 moment: Goal!!!
Year: 1992
Publisher: Taito Corporation
Developer: In-house

On The Ball is an on point SNES conversion of Taito's superb 1989 arcade puzzle game *Cameltry*. If you're unfamiliar with it, your objective is to steer a ball through a labyrinth and reach a goal before time expires. As the game progresses, the mazes become more devilish as more obstacles get thrown into the mix, including blocks that knock seconds off your time if you touch them, and traffic light gates that, well, we're sure you all know how traffic lights work. With your players rotating the maze rather than the ball to move it around, *On The Ball* was pretty much built for Mode 7. Thus it's a superb and faithful conversion, and though it could have benefitted from being a little bit longer, is still a must for puzzle fans.

Wings 2: Aces High



Best Mode 7 moment: The map
Year: 1992
Publisher: Namco
Developer: Malibu

Namco's *Wings 2: Aces High* was WWI placed and made great use of Mode 7. Piloting a WWI biplane, you have to complete a series of bombing and dog fight missions that build up to an aerial battle with the German Top Gun, Red Baron. Mode 7 is used here in two different ways: to create realistic 3D scrolling ground effects as you're flying through the air, and on the bombing missions to zoom the camera towards the floor as your plane flies towards it. The latter is particularly successful as the ground looks crisper the closer you are to it.



Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars



Best Mode 7 moment: Mine car challenge
Year: 1996
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Super Mario RPG is packed with mini-games, but this one is our favourite. Found at the end of the Molehill area, the Mode 7 mine car section serves as both a neat distraction and way to take you to the next section of the adventure. As the car moves on rails (obviously), players have to collect mushrooms and coins and jump any breaks in the track. There are also two Mode 7 side-scrolling sections that add a bit of extra variety to the action too.





The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

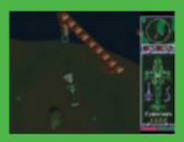


Best Mode 7 moment: Map of Hyrule
Year: 1991
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Hyrule is such a big part of any *Zelda* adventure, so it seems fitting that Nintendo would want to do something special with the map screen. The Mode 7 map plays a prominent part in its gameplay and story, with players not only relying on it to get around the huge world but also allowing them to see the full effects and differences between its light and dark incarnations. It is without doubt one of the most iconic and fondly remembered game maps in history.

Mode 7 Mirrors

Mega Drive



The Mega Drive is unable to do Mode 7 but there are games that show the console doing impress graphics tricks. For a similar rotational effect look at the top-down shooter *Red Zone* in action, or for some exhilarating into-the-screen shooting see *Burning Force.*

Atari Lynx



The Atari Lynx was capable of generating Mode 7-style scaling and rotation effects two years before the Super Nintendo. And the Lynx could actually even go a step better by being able to rotate and scale individual sprites, an effect noticeable in games like *Pit Fighter* and *California Games.*

Sega Mega CD



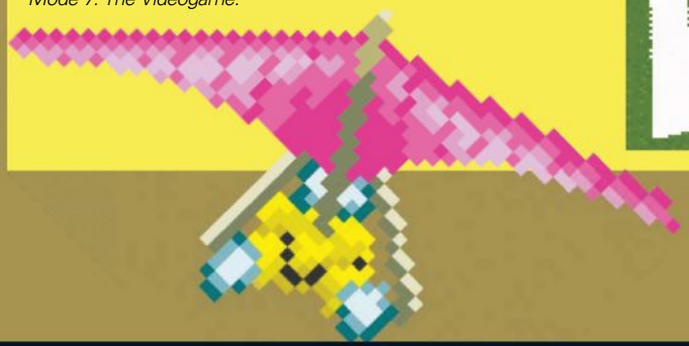
Sega's ill fated CD-Rom add-on for the Mega Drive was capable of Mode 7 effects. Perhaps the most famous example is the 3D bonus stages of *Sonic CD,* which saw Sonic running in a 3D rotating world trying to get those pesky Chaos Emeralds.

Pilotwings

Best Mode 7 moment: Free falling
Year: 1990
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house

Whichever way you cut it, *Pilotwings* just wouldn't have been possible without Mode 7, and that's because here it isn't used to create a fancy background effect, boss or map, but – in a rare instance – an open-feeling world. By Nintendo choosing to base its game in a Flight School rather than the usual po-faced military scenario, it showed that flight sims could be universally fun and accessible. An early release for the Super Nintendo (it was a launch title for the console in the US and Europe), *Pilotwings* was unique. There was nothing really like it on the console market at the time, and it showed perhaps better than any other SNES game the immersive and engaging properties that Mode 7 brought to the table. If you removed Mode 7 from *Pilotwings* then the screen would be as empty and as black as space… or a better metaphor: nothingness. In *Pilotwings*, Mode 7 hardly ever sleeps. It's always in the background working away and showing off the impressive rotation and scaling effects it could generate. For all intents and purposes, *Pilotwings* is *Mode 7: The Videogame.*





IMPORT ONLY



INFO

- **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
- **DEVELOPER:** RAINBOW ARTS
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SUPER NINTENDO
- **ALSO ON:** N/A
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £200+ ($350+)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro



CONTRA
RELEASED: **1987**
Konami's classic run-and-gun series began with this brilliantly brash coin-op shooter. Yes it riffed heavily off alien and wasn't the most original of games, but by goodness it was a lot of fun. While it hit its peak with *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, the original remains a fun blast.

▼ Modern



HARD CORPS: UPRISING
RELEASED: **2011**
This crazy, over-the-top shooter marries the awesome sprite design of Arc System Works to the hard-core stylings of Konami's *Contra* series. The end result is a highly challenging run-and-gun that's as fiendishly hard as it is beautiful to look at. It ties in with the *Contra* series too, being a prequel to the Mega Drive's *Contra: Hard Corps*.

RENDERING RANGER: R2

» Released in very small numbers in Japan, this title, which blends elements of Thunder Force, R-Type and Contra, is regarded as the Holy Grail of Super Nintendo gaming – but is it worthy of its lofty asking price? Stuart Hunt pawns his grandmother's wedding ring to find out

Most import titles will set you back a pretty penny, but it's the rare titles that will almost always command the tall asking prices. Usually when a game is rare, it's because it was produced in the same numbers as Fabergé Eggs, and this is because either it wasn't actually all that good, or was actually quite brilliant but its publisher saw it a risk and did a lacklustre job in seeing its full domestic appeal so only a few copies exist in the world. *Rendering Ranger: R2* (which we'll just dub *R2* from this point on) is an example of the former – it's a glorious-looking SNES shooter that was only snapped up by Virgin Interactive's Japanese arm and, as a result, tragically only saw limited release in Japan, with as few as several thousand copies manufactured according to some sources – which is why complete copies of the game can command asking prices as high as £200 ($350).

Designed by Manfred Trenz, *R2* is one of the Super Nintendo's most obscure titles, but is also one of the machine's little-known import gems, showcasing some of the best 2D visuals you'll see from a Super Nintendo.

As such, anyone who argues that the Super Nintendo is not capable of doing frenetic shooters, and feels that they need more evidence than our *Axelay* feature in issue 80, should take the time to discover the game. Set against the backdrop of a bleak futuristic world under attack from a phalanx of mechanised menaces, *R2* is notable for mixing side-scrolling run-and-gun game sections with multiple scrolling space shooter bits, which both work to make it an epic, unique and varied shooter.

» [SNES] The game's opening stage includes an impressive use of Mode 7 scrolling, as this ship smashes through the stage.



The first section – the run-and-gun component – plays and looks very similar to Konami's Super Nintendo classic, *Contra III*. Assuming the role of a lone soldier who resembles one of the helmeted cops from NARC, you battle through a war-ravaged alien/robot world that



» [SNES] The game was only picked up by Virgin in Japan, hence its scarcity and asking price.



» [SNES] With its visuals, we think the game has a whiff of Amiga shooter about it.

GO DEEPER

What to look out for when playing Rendering Ranger: R2



GRAPHICS
» The visuals and presentation are what really impress us most. Visually, *R2* easily holds it own against the cream of good-looking shooters of the 16-bit era, with each stage upping the visual stakes.

ENEMIES
» There's an impressive range of enemies to battle in Rendering Ranger: R2 and attacks come quickly and often. Keeps your nerves about you and study their attack patterns.

PLAYER
» Similar to *Axelay*, the game frequently switches perspective between a run-and-gun on-foot game (as seen here) to a glorious *Thunderforce*-style shooter. It's like getting two great games in one.

GUN
» Your gun has multiple fire options that are there to help you match and walk away from any occasion. Each fire method also comes with a special smart-bomb-style attack too.

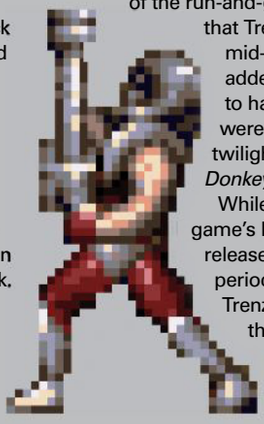
"R2 is widely known for being one of the Super Nintendo's most obscure titles, and one of the machine's little-known import gems"

is teeming with all manner of biomechanical menaces. The graphics and sounds throughout *R2* are superb, with Trenz concocting a seemingly endless roster of enemies to fight and detailed scenery to ensure there is plenty of stuff to catch your eye, even in the backgrounds.

Along with the great visuals, memorable bosses and heavy rock soundtrack, *R2* also featured some awesome firepower. You can collect up to four different upgradable fire types over the course of the game, each with their own unique special attack that self-replenishes, and these can be switched on the fly to suit your situation.

Each of the nine stages in the game is wonderfully designed as well. The third stage, which is the first of the game's spaceship sections, riffs on *Thunderforce III*'s memorable lava stage, while Stage 6 pays fantastic homage to *R-Type*'s Bydo frigate boss/stage – but with players forced to weave in and out of the ship's insides to survive its attack.

If there is one criticism to level at the game, though, it's the difficulty. The game is extremely challenging, with wave after wave of enemies to vanquish, lengthy boss fights to survive and no continues to fall back on.



This hefty challenge culminates in the game's hair-tearing penultimate stage; a claustrophobic descent into a warren of underground tunnels, which requires superhuman reaction times and a dose of luck to get through alive.

When you consider how well the game marries together the two shooter sub-genres, it comes as a surprise to learn that *R2* was originally rumoured to be a straight space shooter. However, due to the popularity of the run-and-gun genre coupled with the huge success that Trenz had seen with *Turrican*, it was decided mid-development that the on-foot sections be added, and that the art style also be changed to hand-drawn pre-rendered sprites, as they were proving popular thanks to the likes of twilight 16-bit titles such as *Killer Instinct* and *Donkey Kong Country*.

While these changes were to blame for the game's lengthy development, which caused its release to fall inside that chancy 1995 interim period between two console generations, Trenz's skill as a designer certainly shines through, masterfully binding together the two parts to create one of the most insane, challenging and sought-after shmups on Super Nintendo.



CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



TURRICAN
» *Turrican* caused a stir on its release, owing to its awe-inspiring visuals, free-roaming gameplay and excellent soundtrack. The game achieved things on humble microcomputers that many didn't think possible. If you want to experience Trenz at his best, then it has to be *Turrican*.

Axelay



Instant Expert

The Japanese and North American versions of *Axelay* were launched within a month of each other. European gamers had to wait an agonising 12 months to get their hands on the game

Although Taro Kudou was responsible for the game's excellent soundtrack, Masanori Adachi remixed Level 2's tune, with memorable results

***Axelay*'s soundtrack was** released on CD in Japan on 21 October 1992

The Axelay fighter was featured in the 2004 PS2 release *Airforce Delta Strike*, which was retitled *Deadly Skies III* in Europe

***Axelay* features references** to other Konami titles, the most obvious being the flame dragons on Level 5 – a cheeky nod to similar enemies in *Gradius II*

A beta version of the game was made available, which allowed players to quickly select which level they wished to tackle as well as gain invincibility. This version was used to bug test portions of the game prior to release

***Axelay*'s main programmer** Hideo Ueda has also worked on the *Castlevania*, *Silent Hill* and *Metal Gear Solid* franchises

To get the 'true' ending you need to complete the game on the hard difficulty setting. Completing it on normal results in the mocking message 'Challenge Hard Mode'

Damien McFerran hops into his custom-made cardboard star fighter and charts a course for the Illis System in order to bring you as much information on Konami's seminal SNES shooter as possible. You better have an itchy trigger finger...

Konami's *Axelay* is a landmark shooter in many ways, but the most striking is the fact that it manages to bring intense alien-blasting action to a format that supposedly struggles with the genre. Much has been made over the years of Nintendo's decision to grant the SNES a CPU operating at a mere 3.58MHz – its rival, the Sega Mega Drive, contained a Motorola 68000 processor, which tore along at a comparatively blistering 7.67MHz – and many critics still maintain that this is the reason for the puzzling lack of decent shmups on the system: the sluggish central processor simply cannot cope with multiple enemies and projectiles on the screen all at the same time, they suggest. There's probably a grain of truth in this assumption, but the theory does come somewhat unstuck when you take a look at *Axelay* in glorious motion.

Released back when SNES titles were still leveraging their graphical superiority over Mega Drive software, *Axelay*'s primary draw was its incredible visuals. Few who were around at the time to witness it in motion can forget the powerful spectacle of the unique rolling perspective, which used the SNES's custom graphics chips to create the impression of flying towards a distant horizon. In truth, it wasn't totally convincing, but it was certainly striking and remains so even today.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

Like *Thunder Force II* and Konami stablemate *Salamander*, *Axelay* alternates between horizontal and side-scrolling levels. This essentially gives shooter addicts the best of both worlds, and both variations offer the same degree of amazing and addictive gameplay. Another constant is the flawless standard of presentation; Mode 7 trickery aside, *Axelay* is a jaw-droppingly gorgeous game and arguably one of the best-looking 16-bit shooters ever created. Not only is the screen awash with highly detailed enemy ships, but the bosses are some of the most memorable ever committed to silicon.

Refreshingly, *Axelay* has top-notch gameplay to back up the appealing aesthetics. Unlike the vast majority of other genre classics, *Axelay* features no weapon or item pick-ups whatsoever. As you advance through the game you gain access to more armaments, which can be loaded onto your craft between missions, but essentially you're given all of the tools you need from the outset of the game. Every situation you encounter during the adventure can be dealt with by switching to one of your three available weapon pods – although naturally some are better at the job than others.

Another unique feature is the way in which your *Axelay* craft

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of Axelay. How many have you seen?


» A-12 Interceptor


» Aquatic Attacker


» Armada Battleship


» Baby Robo Spider

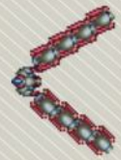

» BombShip


» Colony Defense Droid


» Cyclops


» Depth Charger


» Crawler


» Cutter Blade


» Crawler Carrier


» Drone


» DropShip


» Evil Seahorse


» F19 Fighter Escort


» Fake Axelay


» Fire Floater


» Fire Walker


» Fire Worm


» Supreme Gunship


» S-67 Glider


» G70 Firesailer


» GT56 Attack Craft


» Guard Walker


» Gun Turret


» Jellyfish


» Laser Gunship


» Mine


» Mini Fighter


» Missile Launcher


» Mobile Armour


» R43 Firestorm


» P-90 Fighter


» Pod Turret


» SpiderWalker


» Flying Fish


» Skater


» SpaceBird


» Needler


» Spike Craft

» SpyDroid

» Storm Ship

» Sucker Pod

» Flame Dragon

» Tentacle Tracker

» Tube Spider

» Underwater Turret

» Water Grub

» X-77 Jumper

» X-155 StormBringer

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...

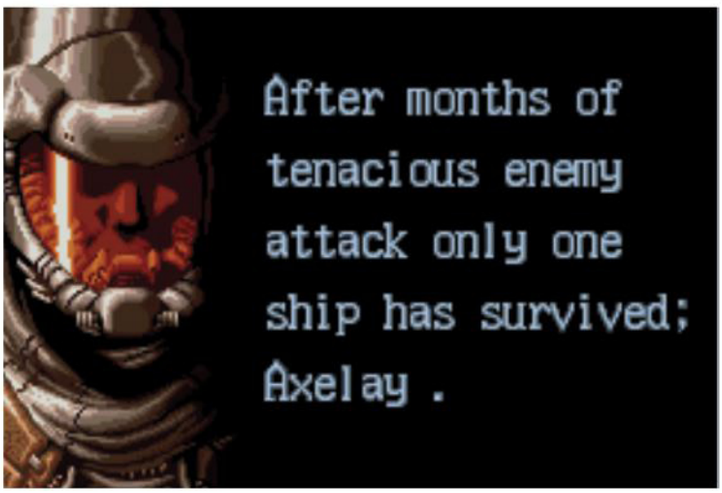


"It's got the best graphics of any game, on any system. Ever. After seeing it, your friends will be so gobsmacked they'll rush out and buy SNESs of their own"

- **SUPER PLAY** 1992

takes damage. Sustaining a direct hit from a projectile doesn't kill you but instead knocks out whatever weapon you have equipped at the time. This means you can take three hits before you lose a life. However, this is balanced by the fact that a direct collision with another craft or part of the environment results in your fighter instantly being ripped asunder in a shower of metal.

When it was launched in 1992, *Axelay* gained incredible praise from all quarters, with the gaming press understandably bowled over by the unique faux-3D scrolling and high standard of presentation. Taro Kudou's perfectly suited soundtrack was also held in high regard and is outstanding, even by today's standards. Given the popularity of the game and its near-dominance of the SNES shooter library, a sequel was almost a given – in fact, the game's ending sequence practically promises a follow-up with the words: 'See you again at *Axelay 2*.' Sadly, despite the rumours and anticipation of fans, Konami never fulfilled that particular pledge. Main programmer Hideo Ueda – who also worked on *TwinBee*, *Quarth* and *Parodius* – remained with the company but Kazuhiko Ishida – who is credited as 'support programmer' on the title – went on to establish Treasure with Masato Maegawa in the same year that *Axelay* was released. It has been a common rumour over the years that other key staffers involved with the game also left Konami with Maegawa and Ishida at the same time, which possibly explains why a planned sequel never materialised.



» [SNES] Poor logistics on the part of the Illis System's defence forces, but the setup made for a great shooter.

Best of the best

Today *Axelay*'s standing in the shooter world is as high as ever, with the game regularly appearing in polls to ascertain the greatest shmup of all time. It continues to command a fair price on the second-hand market, but thankfully for those of you that don't relish the thought of paying over the odds for a dusty old cartridge, *Axelay* has also been made available via Nintendo's Wii-based Virtual Console service, where its lofty reputation has resulted in it being discovered and appreciated by a whole new legion of new fans.



Twin Galaxies High Score

SNES [NTSC]

- **NAME:** PATRICK J DiCESARE
- **POINTS:** 1,974,980

Axelay's Arsenal

Here's a rundown of the weapon systems available on your top-of-the-line D117B Axelay fighter



»Straight Laser
A powerful burst of plasma energy, which is one of your first weapons



»Needle Cracker
A swift-firing homing weapon, which seeks out enemy units



»Wind Laser
The final laser upgrade has a wide range of fire



»Round Vulcan
360 degrees of high-velocity death: a vital weapon



»Morning Star
Another weapon handy for taking out several enemies at once



»Macro Missile
A powerful rocket with a large blast radius



»Explosion Bomb
Air-to-ground missiles useful for taking out gun turrets



»Cluster Bomb
Quite similar to the Explosion Bomb, but fires backwards

Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy Konami's coders let loose on 16-bit hardware

A matter of perspective

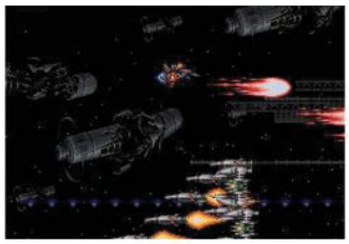
Granted, *Axelay*'s Mode 7 scrolling landscape isn't all that realistic and looks a little outdated, but in 1992 it was astonishing. 2D shooters had always been relatively flat affairs, and Konami's graphical trick was impressive.





Afraid of spiders

Arachnatron may not be the toughest boss you'll face, but he's one of the most unforgettable. Almost filling the screen, this beastie shows some stunning animation and was a class above the static guardians in most shooters of the era.



Going sideways

Mixing horizontal and vertical scrolling in shooters wasn't new in 1992 – in fact, Konami had done it before – but that doesn't detract from the shock of entering Level 2 and realising that you're scrolling in a different direction.



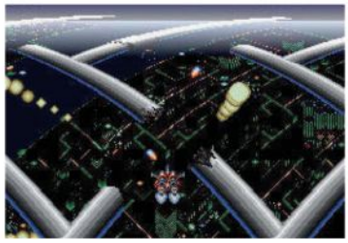
Twenty seconds to comply

In 1992 *RoboCop* was still a household name, and *Axelay*'s second boss is shamelessly based on the scary rogue security bot ED-209. The eerily robotic music further accentuated the rather oppressive nature of this boss battle.



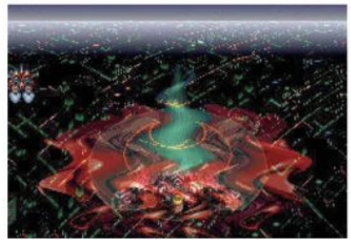
Rings around the world

Level 2 starts off as a typical space station environment, but halfway through you realise that you're in a 'ring world' – a concept made famous in Japanese anime series *Gundam* and the more recent *Halo* titles.



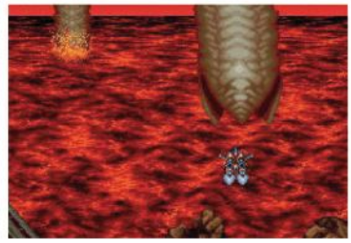
Barrier to entry

Level 3 takes place above the neon lights of a brightly coloured city, but you'll be focused on navigating the vast network of barriers that block your path – taking out the weak segments causes them to plummet towards the ground.



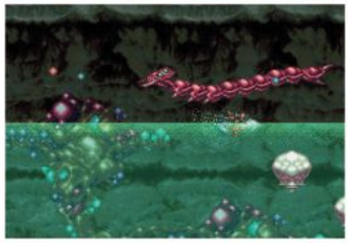
Don't go changing

The third boss that you face starts off looking anything but fearsome, but after taking a beating he morphs into a massive battle station thanks to the incredible graphical power of Nintendo's 16-bit hardware.



I got worms

Someone at Konami was clearly a Frank Herbert fan, because Level 5 features some massive worms that bear more than a passing resemblance to those witnessed in the author's legendary sci-fi epic *Dune*.



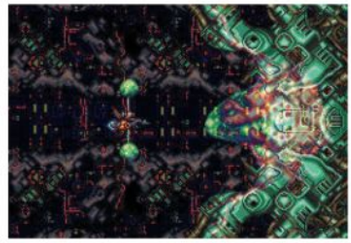
Skimming the surface

Every decent shooter needs an underwater segment, and *Axelay* has one in Level 4. Placing your ship above the surface of the water causes water to splash up; just one of many awesome graphical effects in the game.



You and whose army?

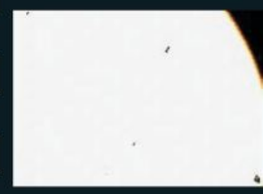
The final stage throws you in at the deep end, fighting against a bunch of ships so large that they don't even fit on the screen. In terms of pure spectacle it's one of the game's most impressive moments.



Copycat

The final boss is a sneaky fellow and even goes as far as to replicate your ship and use clones against you. Seeing his scanning field appear and methodically copy your craft is a terrifying – but nonetheless impressive – event.

After blowing away the evil enemy leader you're left to reflect on your incredible accomplishment. The effort was worth it, as you've single-handedly saved an entire star system from the unspeakable horrors of alien oppression. In other words, you're something of a diamond geezer.













Boss Rush

Many shmup aficionados would argue that a blaster lives and dies by the quality of its boss encounters, and *Axelay* certainly doesn't disappoint in this department. As well as a truly fearsome number of mid-level bosses, the game boasts some of the most unforgettable level guardians to grace the 16-bit era. These epic enemies are notable not only for their variety and cunning tactics, but for allowing the SNES to showcase some of its most impressive visual tricks, with sprite rotation, Mode 7 scaling and smooth animation. Here's a rundown of the supreme beings waiting for you at the conclusions of *Axelay*'s levels.

Arachnatron



Stage One - Cumuluses

Throughout the history of shooters there has been a custom of memorable opening bosses, and the mechanical spider that waits at the conclusion of *Axelay*'s first level certainly conforms to that tradition. Boasting spookily authentic animation thanks to its multi-jointed nature – each limb is a separate sprite – and a fearsome phalanx of baby spider robots supporting from the rear, it's no wonder that Arachnatron has remained indelibly inked in the memory of many a SNES gamer. Naturally, its status as the game's debut boss encounter results in a relatively low degree of difficulty: the tractor-beam web that Archanatron occasionally spits out slows your ship down, making it harder to dodge incoming projectiles, but on the whole you'll find this chap looks a lot more scary than he actually is. Focus all of your firepower on the mouth section initially because, once you destroy it, the web can no longer be fired. After this you should throw all of your available weaponry at the eye, which is the spider's weak spot.

T-36 Towbar





Stage Two - Tralieb Colony

Bearing an uncanny resemblance to bipedal *RoboCop* antagonist ED-209, the T-36 Towbar lurks in a battered and derelict portion at the end of the Tralieb Colony. Animated using a combination of sprites and smoothly rotating Mode 7 effects, this two-legged monster slowly stumbles backwards along the corridor, stopping every so often to attempt to blow your fragile craft out of the air. When Towbar pauses to attack, make sure you're high up near the ceiling of the level. He will either shoot with his machine gun, which can be blasted off if you feel like adjusting the odds in your favour, or engage his deadly laser beam attack. Both attacks can be angled, so you'll need to make sure you're in the top-right corner of the screen to avoid being vaporised. Towbar's weak spot is the exposed motor unit just behind his protective hood; the explosive nature of your missiles or bombs can penetrate his defensives for massive damage. This resourceful enemy is also capable of hurling smaller projectiles your way, so don't let your guard down.

Regenertoid





Stage Three - Urbanite

This end-of-level boss starts off in a rather underwhelming fashion, teleporting onto the screen as a tiny ship before changing into the shape of a spinning top. What it lacks in visual impact it makes up for in raw aggression, though – you'll need to take out the various gun ports on the rim of Regenertoid to put a stop to the hail of bullets that it spews out. Doing this also triggers the second stage of the attack: the rather pathetic cone-like shape is augmented by fearsome red battle armour, complete with devastating laser cannons that fill up large portions of the screen when fired – just make sure you're not anywhere near them at the time. Focus your attack on the centre of Regenertoid's shell and you'll send it packing in next to no time, but make sure you keep moving because this monster's massive size means that on-screen real estate is kept to a bare minimum, making it hard to manoeuvre.

Aquadon





Stage Four - The Cavern

Looking every inch like the kind of crustacean you'd run a mile from if you ever encountered it on a beach, Aquadon ramps up the difficulty level with his multiple attack capabilities. If you don't get taken out by the needle laser blasts and procession of unfriendly minions that swarm around his thick shell, you'll still have to face the prospect of being zapped by his irksome lightning bolt attack. While this isn't deadly in itself, it stuns your craft temporarily and causes your weapons system to go haywire, which often means you'll end up with an attack that is woefully mismatched for the situation, forcing you to quickly re-select the correct armament. Aquadon has two weak spots, both of which must be pushed backwards into his shell before the other opens up. You'll need to pay close attention to which weak spot is exposed at any one time, as you'll more often than not be looking elsewhere on the screen to avoid the many hostile objects flying in your general direction.

Wayler

Stage Five - Lava Planet

Transported from the soggy depths of the Cavern to the fiery wastes of the imaginatively named Lava Planet, your waterlogged space suit is likely to dry out quickly, but unfortunately you'll also have to face off against one of the game's most famous faces and the cover star of the Western version: Wayler. A massive cyborg capable of withstanding extreme temperatures and clad in molten lava, this brute is yet another example of the SNES's graphical muscle, showcasing smooth, multi-segmented animation and filling almost the entire screen. Like any other self-respecting fire robot, Wayler is fond of spewing flames from his mouth and flailing his enormous arms around like a child at a school disco, causing untold amounts of damage to any spaceship foolish enough to be in close proximity. Be sure to keep well away from those massive mitts of his and channel all of your energy into blasting away at his chest. Doing so reveals his weak spot – a green 'heart' – that, once destroyed, forces Wayler's lifeless body to sink beneath the red-hot planet surface, never to return.



Veinion



Stage Six - The Armada of Annihilation's Fortress

After fighting your way through the hostile alien fleet and infiltrating the enemy base, you're faced with the final challenge: Veinion, the evil leader of the Armada of Annihilation. At first glance he appears to be some kind of robotic overlord, but after ceaselessly blasting away for a while you'll uncover his true form: a horrific alien organism, which has the capability of copying your attacks. Your ship is scanned and Veinion proceeds to hurl clone Axelay craft in your direction. Needless to say, this is the hardest boss battle in the entire game and seems to last for an age. Even when you've finally destroyed Veinion and made good your escape from the rapidly disintegrating alien fortress, the battle is far from over – the enemy leader tries to prevent your getaway by filling the screen with shrapnel and blocking your progress. Land a few well-aimed missiles in his gullet and he vanishes into the ether, leaving the path open for you to return home to a rapturous reception and more canapés and fizzy drink than you can reasonably consume.





RPG Heaven: THE GREATEST SNES RPGS OF ALL TIME

During the infamous 16-bit console wars, both the Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo had their strengths that attracted gamers. One such strength of the Super Nintendo was the sheer amount of high-quality role-playing games available for it. Here we take a look at some of the best and most celebrated titles on Nintendo's machine







Terranigma

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1995

Terranigma is something of an oddity in the Super Nintendo RPG library. It was first released in 1995 in Japan under the title *Tenchi Sozo*, which translates as 'The Creation of Heaven and Earth'. A year later it was localised by Nintendo for the PAL markets but somehow never saw a release in America. This was extremely rare as most SNES RPGs made the trip to the US first and only a handful ever made it to PAL territories, a fact that explains why *Terranigma* now commands very high prices when bought online.

Terranigma is an action RPG that tells the story of Ark and his quest to resurrect life on Earth. It uses a top-down view and a fairly simple, but quite deep, real-time combat system. Ark has plenty of abilities such as dashing, jumping, sliding, guarding and an unusual magic system. For example, you must find Magirocks, which are taken to the magic shop to be turned into consumable spells. Once used, the spells turn back into Magirock and can be taken to the shop again. The game moves at quite a pace, even for an action-based RPG. Ark is instantly controllable and responds to commands on a whim, making him a joy to control.

The meat of *Terranigma* involves the resurrection of Earth. Once you complete the first five towers at the start of the game, the continents of the world are restored and Ark travels to the mainland in order to kick-start life. Your first task is to revive the plant life to enable nature to begin its journey. Ark can converse with the plants and they will guide you to revive the animals and then eventually mankind. This is predominantly achieved by travelling to various parts of the world to complete dungeons, gain items and trigger the multitude of story events.

The reason *Terranigma* is so good, though, is down to expert execution of various elements by developers Quintet. It manages to tell a wonderfully moving story and mix in plenty of original elements within the genre. For example, once you revive mankind, you are tasked with building the economies of the continents by helping residents make discoveries and then introducing them to different cultures.

The plot is quite unique because you play a large portion of the game with no real enemy. Normally in RPGs there is a defining evil from the very beginning of the game, but not so with *Terranigma*, which unravels with a level of skill not seen in many console games of the time. It's filled with deception, regret, love, religion and science and told with excellent pacing.

Terranigma also features superb graphics that vary from dank, desolate landscapes to vibrant jungles. The animation is excellent, character designs are attractive and the boss fights are impressive. The music is also superb, one of the best soundtracks of the generation for sure.

We're praying the game gets a Virtual Console release so it can be enjoyed by those who missed it the first time around. This is probably the most anticipated game on the service now *Earthbound* has been released. *Terranigma* is an all-time classic that despite commanding high prices is worth a place in any SNES owner's collection.





Soul Blazer

PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR:** 1992

Seen as the first part of an unofficial trilogy that features both *Illusion of Time* and *Terranigma*, *Soul Blazer* is an action RPG based around the theme of resurrection. Essentially a dungeon-crawler, the player is tasked with freeing the souls of lost humans which, once released, rebuild the towns around them on your way to defeating the evil Deathtoll. The game tells a simple but poignant story that certainly has the power to draw the player in. Combat is also rather simple but somehow it all works like a dream because it's fast-paced, with plenty of enemies and some excellent boss battles. A forgotten gem you need to experience.

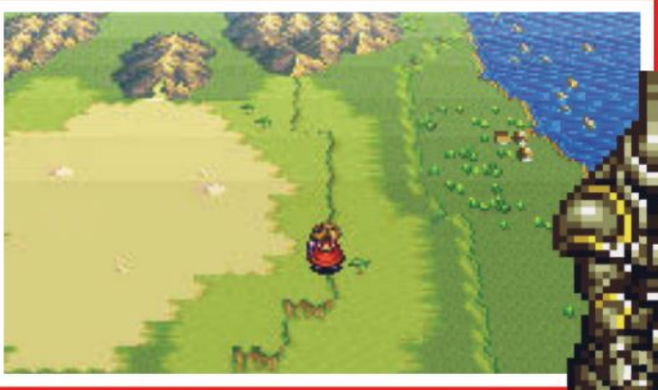




Mystic Quest Legend

PUBLISHER: SQUARE (US/JP) NINTENDO (PAL) **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE **YEAR:** 1992

Developed by Square and aimed as an entry-level RPG, *Mystic Quest Legend* was notable for being the first *Final Fantasy*-themed game released in the PAL regions, although it was a spin-off rather than actual canon. Despite being dramatically cut down in the overall gameplay department, *Mystic Quest Legend* is absorbing and enjoyable mainly thanks to its fun battle system and some fantastic music. There are no random battles here, as enemies are onscreen and a battle starts when you touch them. The game is also littered with optional battle arenas for levelling. With plenty of items, weapons and enemies, it's a simple but enjoyable experience.









Breath of Fire II

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM (NA/JP) LAGUNA (EU) **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1994

Superior in almost every way to its predecessor, Capcom's *Breath of Fire II* is another high-quality RPG for the Super Nintendo. The majority of the game is viewed from a traditional top-down perspective, but battles are viewed from a visually superb isometric viewpoint that features fantastic sprites and glorious special effects. Combat is turn-based and does feature random battles, but the pace of battles remains fast enough to avoid frustration. Centring around now series-staple characters Ryu and Nina, Ryu has the ability to transform into a dragon, which is one of the most interesting parts of the game. The recurring characters, much like *The Legend of Zelda*'s, are descendants of previous characters and not the same ones. Despite a sluggish start and occasionally iffy translation, *Breath of Fire II* picks up pace to evolve into a truly great RPG.





Front Mission

PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER:** G-CRAFT **YEAR:** 1995

Released only in Japan in 1995, *Front Mission* still managed to gain a cult following in the West and was finally released in an officially translated form in North America during 2007 on Nintendo's DS. The game is an RPG of a tactical nature with linear game progression and a deep, entertaining plot. Set in 2090 and revolving around the colonisation of a fictitious island in the Pacific Ocean, *Front Mission* tells a tale that's as intriguing as it is fresh. The battle system is mostly in the usual tactical mould, however when attacks are performed, the game cuts to a close-up of the target in question for some spectacular visual effects. Depth comes from the customisation on offer. The majority of units are Wanzers, giant walking tanks that have four unique health bars: one each for the legs, left arm, right arm and body. Each is upgradable as the game progresses. It's different, but highly recommended.





Illusion of Time

PUBLISHER: ENIX (JP) NINTENDO (WORLD) **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET **YEAR** 1993

Despite being another action RPG, *Illusion of Time* is quite a different beast to many similar games. Eschewing many staples of the genre, such as experience points, currency or equipment, *Illusion of Time* centres around Will and his alter egos in a plot to uncover the secrets of the Tower of Babel. Like *Terranigma*, the world is based loosely on Earth and features many locations such as The Great Wall of China and the Egyptian Pyramids. After adventuring to the Tower of Babel with his father, disaster strikes and Will returns to the village alone with no recollections of what happened. The game begins in earnest when Will gains the ability to make his first of two transformations. Will does have the ability to increase his power by collecting jewels dropped when clearing a room of enemies, but this unique skill can only be done once per room. It all makes for a highly novel adventure.





Ogre Battle

PUBLISHER: ENIX **DEVELOPER:** QUEST **YEAR:** 1995

One of the most important things about *Ogre Battle* is that it launched one of the most successful careers in Japan, namely Yasumi Matsuno, who went on to create several mega hits, two of which scored 40/40 in *Famitsu*. The other most important thing is that it's also an excellent strategy RPG, although it plays out more like an RTS title, such as *Command & Conquer*, upon entering battle. *Ogre Battle* has plenty of depth when preparing for combat. It features a tarot card system that can be used to add certain effects at certain times. There's an alignment system that's a play on the good/evil theme, a day/night cycle that affects how certain classes or cards react in fights and more than 70 different classes of units to control. Set to a gripping, politically motivated plot and boasting some lovely visuals, *Ogre Battle* comes highly recommended to those that like a good challenge.







Secret of Evermore

PUBLISHER: SQUARE **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

In 1995, Super Nintendo fans were hugely anticipating *Secret of Mana 2*. Instead they got *Secret of Evermore*, a game developed by a team in America that Square had set up solely for creating it.

After the initial disappointment that *Mana 2* was not coming, *Secret of Evermore* turned out to be an excellent take on the *Mana* gameplay system, but with a contemporary setting in America. The plot is based around time travel and involves an unnamed boy and his dog while featuring plenty of clever B-movie references. What we love about *Secret of Evermore* is that it is packed with interesting ideas. Each region has a different currency, which can be converted at certain vendors and as you travel to each time zone, your dog takes on a different form relevant to that zone. Magic is based around alchemy, so you have to create your spells before you can cast them. The dog can also be used to sniff out ingredients for you, delivering another nice touch in a game that's littered with them.











Chrono Trigger

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

This epic RPG was developed by Squaresoft and featured a creative team that had fans of the genre salivating. Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of *Final Fantasy*; Yuji Horii, creator of long-term rival Enix's *Dragon Quest*; and Akira Toriyama, artist of *Dragon Ball Z* and *Dragon Quest*, were all lead designers on the project. This led to *Chrono Trigger* being massively anticipated by Japanese and Western RPG fans alike. We're pleased to say this masterpiece delivered on all counts.

The first thing you notice about the game is the very *Dragon Ball Z*-style art. It's striking compared to the sombre styling of *Final Fantasy VI*. Characters have wild spiky hair, colours are vivid but retain a realistic style that sits somewhere between other popular Squaresoft games.

On the surface, *Chrono Trigger* seems like any other Japanese RPG, however it contains several important innovations that set it apart from them. The first of these is the complete elimination of random battles and the separate battle plain. Enemies are visible at all times, so once you come into contact with one the battle begins and plays out on the same screen, rather than cutting to a battle map. This helps to not only avoid the frustration of random encounters, but also allows the level of immersion into the world to remain high without the jarring change of scenery.

The next major innovation is its many multiple endings. *Chrono Trigger* features no fewer than 14 different endings to discover, many of them accessible through the excellent new Game Plus feature that's now standard on many of today's games.

Throughout the game, lead character Crono travels across various time zones ranging from 65000000BC to 2300AD. This gave the developers a real freedom to create very diverse and interesting locations, ranging from the dinosaur-infested forests of the past to the malfunctioning domes of the future. The story itself is excellent with intriguing enemies, genuine heart-felt moments and a great translation that still stands up today.

Chrono Trigger is a masterpiece of game design and it hasn't aged at all since it was first released in 1995. Anyone with even a passing interest in the genre should check it out immediately. Just be aware that it's a little on the pricey side.



Super Mario RPG

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** SQUARESOFT **YEAR:** 1996 (NTSC)

Super Mario RPG is a landmark title in many different ways. On the one hand it was a stunning collaboration between Nintendo and Square, but on the other it was one of the last Square-developed titles on a Nintendo platform for some time.

The first thing new players should do when starting the game is to watch the brilliant Attract mode. This gives players a great idea of the sheer amount of superb ideas that have been crammed into it. Featuring a mix of action platforming and turn-based combat, *Super Mario RPG* is a fast-paced, absorbing adventure, which is incredibly accessible to even the most novice of RPG fans. Visually the game looks 32-bit, as it features similar rendering techniques to *Donkey Kong Country* and a distinctive 3D isometric viewpoint. The music is suitably twee but never annoying as expected from now industry legend, Yoko Shimomura.

If there is one thing that *Super Mario RPG* does so well, it's that it highlights Squaresoft in its prime and how big a deal it was when Nintendo finally lost the talented developer to Sony.



Shadowrun

PUBLISHER: DATA EAST/LASER BEAM **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE **YEAR:** 1993

One of the most unique titles on the SNES, *Shadowrun* combines action RPG-style gameplay with elements of the point-and-click genre that was popular on computers at the time. Set in the not-too-distant future, your task as Jake Armitage is to track down your missing identity and to find the person that wants you dead. The cyberpunk setting feels very fresh on the console, the isometric visual style is nicely detailed, while the music is suitably matched and well composed. Piecing together the plot is a hugely compelling experience, while talking to NPCs opens up new conversational opportunities to help you through this more adult of Super Nintendo RPGs.





Secret of Mana

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1993

Secret of Mana is a hugely popular action RPG and for good reason. Squaresoft's game features sumptuous graphics, incredible music and a stunning three-player mode that instantly made it stand apart from other RPGs of the time.

First released in 1993 and a follow up to the Game Boy classic *Mystic Quest*, *Secret of Mana* captivated audiences from the get go. It tells a simple story of a young boy who discovers a mysterious sword that he pulls, Arthur-like, from solid stone. It turns out that Mana, the lifeblood of the land, is being drained by the enemy in order to control the world; leaving the hero to energise the failing Mana Sword and hopefully restore balance to the land.

Visually, *Secret of Mana* is stunning, with some of the best visuals to be seen on a 16-bit system at the time. Locations are diverse, ranging from desert plateaus, bustling villages and evergreen forests, with Upperland being a standout location, as you literally walk through the forest as the seasons change from one to the next. Sonically the game doesn't disappoint either. The music in the opening sequence is still one of the most stunning in gaming, even today. Using sampled pipes, bass and various synthesised sounds among others, *Secret of Mana*'s soundtrack is diverse, often beautiful, yet dark and dramatic when it needs to be.

At its core, it's an action RPG featuring character levels, weapon levels and magic levels. Eight weapons are available to the player, which can be upgraded throughout the adventure. Magic too comes in eight forms and covers a variety of traditional elements. The biggest aspect of the game, however, is that it can be played by up to three players using a multi-tap. This is something that has rarely been done since, which is disappointing, as it completely takes a usually solitary experience and livens it up immensely. On the downside, when in single player the AI can cause a few minor issues, although its behaviour can be adjusted. Ultimately though, *Secret of Mana* is another classic RPG for Nintendo's 16-bit console.







Earthbound

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **DEVELOPER:** HAL/APE **RELEASE:** 1994

Earthbound is certainly one of the most interesting titles for the Super Nintendo. On the surface it appears to be fairly simplistic, but the more time spent with it, the more you realise just how unique it actually is. In fact, there's nothing else quite like it on any 16-bit console.

Set in modern-day America, *Earthbound* is a Japanese take on the American lifestyle with often-hilarious results. It tells the story of Ness and his friends and their adventure to defeat the evil Giygas, the leader of an alien invasion on planet Earth.

The graphics have a simple but extremely charming style to them, coming across like a cute Saturday morning cartoon. The world itself is presented in a pseudo-3D style and is completely seamless from one location to the next – very uncommon within the actual genre. The fighting system is generally standard, but the actions of characters during fights will leave players grinning from ear to ear, as they're so entertaining. Despite a fairly slow pace, *Earthbound* is an incredibly charming and wacky game that deserves to be played through. It's now available on Virtual Console, meaning you'll no longer have to shell out over £500 for the original game.



Final Fantasy VI

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **RELEASE:** 1994

Leading up to the release of *Final Fantasy VI*, Squaresoft was building a massive reputation in the RPG scene. Enix, developer of *Dragon Quest*, was the most popular in Japan at the time, but *Final Fantasy VI* certainly marked a shift in Square's favour. It was simply an astonishing package, which was wonderfully ambitious with its storytelling and dark themes. Couple this with glorious visuals and a critically acclaimed soundtrack and it's no wonder *Final Fantasy VI* is often heralded as the best game in the series by American and Japanese audiences.

The plot is quite dark and at times even depressing, as you work your way through the many areas of the game, meeting hundreds of interesting characters along the way. The central character of the story is a young girl called Terra. When you first meet her she has been brainwashed by the evil empire and is being controlled in order to attack Espers (magical beings) and wipe them out. Once free of the empire, Terra goes on a journey of discovery to find out where she is from and rediscover her forgotten memories. Along the way some absolutely magnificent characters are met: Shadow the ninja with his trusty canine sidekick Interceptor; Edgar the King Of Figaro, who has an eye for the ladies; Ultros who is apparently octopus royalty; and Kefka, the antagonist of the game and none other than a court jester! Kefka aims to defeat the Espers to take control of the magic and indeed the world. It's the duty of the player to stop him. Along the way, themes of love, regret, isolation, desperation and many others are carefully explored. Squaresoft did an excellent job with such a deep plot and it still impresses today.

Plot aside, *Final Fantasy VI* plays out much like traditional Japanese RPG with active turn-based combat and plenty of random battles. With 14 playable characters and masses of customisation, it's an all-time classic that is climbing in price and desirability.





Seiken Densetsu 3

PUBLISHER: SQUARESOFT **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE **YEAR:** 1995

Despite never being released outside of Japan, *Seiken Densetsu 3* has built up a huge following over the years, with many fans that are still desperate for an official translation. There are many reasons for this, but the most obvious are its graphics, which are achingly beautiful and easily sit alongside some of the best 32-bit 2D RPGs.

Like its predecessor, *Secret of Mana*, *Seiken Densetsu 3* is an action RPG with deep combat and a multiplayer option, although it only supports two players. It's packed with many unique features, however, including a branching story arc, absolutely huge bosses and a day-and-night cycle with each day based on an element that affects magic as a result. *Seiken Densetsu 3* never made it to the West because of a few technical problems in the game's code, but it has been translated by fans and is fully playable in English, although sourcing a Japanese copy is still worth doing.





THE CLASSIC GAME

With its lush visuals, buckets of charm, humour, wonderful music, and world that meshed elements from platform, puzzle, shmup and RPG games, the West's first entry in the *Mystical Ninja* (aka *Ganbare Goemon*) series of games is one of the craziest platform games to appear on the Super Nintendo. Stuart Hunt puffs on his smoking pipe and inhales the madness of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.



THE EVOLUTION OF GOEMON



MR GOEMON
Arcade, 1986
For his arcade debut, originally Goemon's look took cues from traditional Ukiyo-e paintings. The game was a quirky side-scrolling run-and-jump game that played similarly to the platform sections in *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.



GANBARE GOEMON
Famicom, 1986
For Goemon's first console release, the Ukiyo-e look was dropped – though not in the game's box art – in favour of a more anime-looking cartoon sprite. We think the white parts in his eyes make him look a little angly, though.



GANBARE GOEMON 2
Famicom, 1989
The Famicom sequel, which was the first to introduce the co-op mode and Ebisumaru, opted to make Goemon look like a character in the comic strip *Peanuts*, with a change of hairstyle that he would keep in subsequent exploits.



LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA
SNES, 1991
The added muscle of the Super Nintendo allowed Konami to breathe more personality into the character. This the first incarnation of Goemon with his blue-tinted hair and red and yellow outfit.



GANBARE GOEMON 2
SNES, 1993
The Goemon sprite in the SNES follow-up to the original didn't really deviate much from the original. The only notable difference is that the sprite looks more detailed, slightly chunkier and has spikier hair.



GANBARE GOEMON: SHIN SEDAI SHUUMEI
PlayStation, 2001
A series reboot of sorts, this PlayStation game reimagined the *Goemon* world by setting it in the future and going all *Dragon Ball* in the looks department.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



It has something for everyone

Easily the best aspect of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* is the sheer amount of variety that Konami managed to cram in. Bursting at the seams with character and diversity, the second you boot the game you are greeted by wacky and humorous enemies and bosses, a world brimming with things to discover, and various little nods to other Konami franchises. You can't help but get immersed in the world. While the game can admittedly be a slow burn to begin with, this is largely due to the game throwing so much at you so quickly. Once you settle into the game you can't help but be captivated.



A game of two halves

The basic gameplay of *Mystical Ninja* is divided into two sections. The first section of each stage is reminiscent of titles like *Jack The Nipper* and *Everyone's A Wally*, and takes its cues from the NES series. Set inside various hamlets, full of quirky and often bizarre enemies, these sections show off the amount of effort that Konami put into the game. The second sections are more typical side-scrolling platformer bits, with tricky jump sequences, imaginative levels, and a large array of enemies and bosses to duff up. The contrast of the two styles works well to offer a platform game with far more character than its peers.



Kid Ying and Dr Yang

First introduced in *Ganbare Goemon 2* on the Famicom, one of the best elements of *Mystical Ninja* was the fact that two players could play through the game together as Goemon and his odd sidekick Ebisumaru, named Kid Ying and Dr Yang respectively in the West. Save for signature weapons, the differences between the characters are nominal, but the co-op mode does have its benefits. The characters can ride on each other's backs, allowing one to focus on attacking while the other moves. While this may sound a little awkward, it actually makes negotiating the trickier platform sections in the game a little bit easier.



Memories from a geisha

There are plenty of memorable end-level bosses in the game, so picking one wasn't easy. In the end, we went with this thing: a chubby samurai tag team that changes into a giant floating head that looks like Gordon Brown made up to look like a geisha girl. Admittedly, we picked this boss entirely for that reason. If you're looking for a more sensible motive from us then we also like the way that whenever you hit this thing it grows until it envelops the entire screen, like something from a Roald Dahl story. It makes your job hitting it easier, but avoiding getting smothered by its chilling smile is much harder.



More than you can shake a pipe at

One of the best elements is the sheer amount of stuff there is to see and do in the town sections. You can place a bet on a horse race, partake in a quiz show, explore some cavernous 3D mazes, or even play some mini-games, including a one-level version of Konami's classic shooter *Gradius*. While rarely necessary to actually go exploring inside the towns – in all of the stages bar one, if we remember rightly, you can dash through these sections to reach the platform bits – these asides are a great way to replenish health, stock up on lives or simply take a much-needed break from the action.



Cat statues

Look out for the grey kitten statues that are randomly dropped by enemies, as they power up your weapons. Ying bonks his enemies on the noggin using a smoking pipe, while Yang uses his flute. The first phase will extend them, offering you a better reach, and the second will transform them into a yo-yo for Ying and a party blower for Yang. As well as this, each character can also use the money they find as a projectile weapon – a neat feature – and several different judo moves too, ranging from temporary flight and an attack that smites multiple enemies on screen, to a neat animal companion to ride on.



What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines

"The Japanese excel at producing cutesy-style games, and *Goemon* must rank as one of the finest examples yet, with brilliant sprites and varied backdrops."

What we think

Mystical Ninja hasn't lost any of its charm. Actually, we found returning to the game as enjoyable an experience as when we first discovered it many moons ago. The graphics still look great, the music is still toe-tappingly catchy and the humour is still funny. A timeless classic, then.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SNES
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM

THE MAKING OF

SUPER MARIO RPG

Legend Of The Seven Stars

1996 marked the end of the road for the SNES, but Nintendo wasn't about to let it go down without a fight. Sorrel Tilley caught up with director Chihiro Fujioka to get the scoop on Super Mario's super swansong



IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **» DEVELOPER:** SQUARE
- **» RELEASED:** 1996
- **» PLATFORM:** SNES
- **» GENRE:** RPG

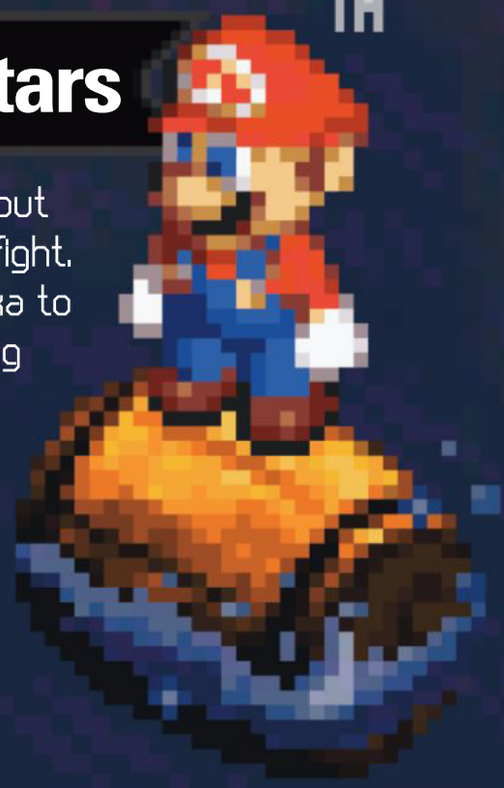


There's no denying it. Life was sweet for the SNES owner. Within the space of just five years, the system's library was swollen with classics, and chief among them were masterpieces crafted by Square and Nintendo. The mere mention of the likes of *Final Fantasy VI*, *Chrono Trigger* and *Super Mario World* are enough to send most gamers into paroxysms of nostalgia. It is said that all good things must come to an end, but even as the sun was setting on the SNES, behind closed doors the movers and shakers were planning something unprecedented – a collaboration between two of the biggest developers of the era.

The result of this partnership was Nintendo's moustachioed mascot's first foray in the role-playing genre. Square's own Chihiro Fujioka recalls how it went down: "The original idea was decided in meetings at the highest level. When I was put in charge, it had already been set in stone, but I heard that the background to it was that due to the very close relationship between Nintendo and Square in those days, working together on a project meant they would combine their respective strong suits – the Mario character and RPG development."

The basic concept was a simple one; its execution was not. Taking a beloved figurehead and throwing him headlong into a new genre without upsetting the fans requires a lot of thought, as Fujioka explains: "The world view and the story changed completely. In the beginning, we thought Mario would be fighting using weapons and magic, but as you'd expect, we concluded that Mario was more suited to the hammer and jumping, so we modified the settings and the story. Even after development had moved on, we were still beating our heads over whether or not Mario should use weapons and magic. Mr Miyamoto also seemed to be in two minds over this. It was only when we both took to the stage at a magazine event that we finally decided.

"It was at the V-Jump Festival, an event organised by Shueisha's monthly game and hobby magazine. Readers were invited to the venue so that publishers could introduce games that were about to be released. It was here that *Super Mario RPG* was revealed to the world for the first time – I remember how surprised the readers and the organisers were. Right at the time of this magazine event, we had to decide on Mario's fighting style – weapons and magic, or jumping and hammers? Even while we were backstage at the event, Mr Miyamoto and I were still talking it over. Then, when it became our turn to introduce our game, I said: 'Let's just decide his fighting style based on how much the









» [SNES] The eagle-eyed will spot plenty of Nintendo character cameos.

audience applauds.' Mr Miyamoto replied doubtfully, 'Is that going to be okay?' but we went along with the plan anyway."

"To tell the truth, though, there was a feeling, among the staff too, that it would be best if Mario fought with hammers and jumping. Actually asking the audience was a big gamble, but I came up with a bit of a scheme to make sure things went our way. First, I said suddenly, but in a normal, businesslike voice: 'Could you please clap if you think that because this time Mario is in an RPG, it would be good if he used weapons and magic.' Small applause. Next, in a loud voice, full of energy and excitement: 'But of course this is Mario, so it'd be way better if he fought with jumps and hammers, right? Those people – applaud now!' Lots of applause. And that's how it turned out. Mr Miyamoto – sorry for worrying you!"

Mario's unexpected appearance in an RPG aside, audiences were wowed by his new 3D look. The team had been hard at work on the same Silicon Graphics workstations that Nintendo had authorised Rare to purchase for its *Donkey Kong Country* series. Although a rudimentary 2D version of the game was created, it was used mainly as a testing ground for Mario's movement and abilities before plans for the switch to 3D were finalised.

"At that point in time, Square was putting a lot of effort into visual presentation, and they had really pursued this up to the limits of what the Super Famicom hardware could do with 2D methods," explains Fujioka. "The big question was where to go from there. I think it was natural that things would go in the direction of 3D. When I think about it now, the whole of Square was headed that way. Of course, in the beginning, we had a traditional top-down map with a 2D Mario, but at a fairly early stage we revised it to a slanted 3D perspective, so after that we also had to make the entire graphic design follow suit. Even with the SA-1 chip, the Super Famicom wasn't capable of displaying 3D in real-time, so we went with a pre-rendering technique."

> In the beginning, we thought Mario would fight using magic, but we concluded that he was more suited to the hammer and jumping

This SA-1 chip was another weapon in Nintendo's arsenal of enhancements that kept SNES games evolving over time. While Sega was developing pricey add-on systems to prevent the Mega Drive from becoming stale, Nintendo opted to boost its hardware with special co-processor chips included within the game cartridges themselves. Possibly the most famous of these was the Super FX chip, which handled the real-time 3D effects in games such as *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*. The Super Accelerator 1 was less common outside Japan, with only three games seeing international release. "The SA-1 chip had four times the processing power of the Super Famicom," Fujioka elaborates. "Adding that to the console's CPU made five times the processing power possible. *Super Mario RPG* didn't use polygons, but the whole thing utilised a 3D field, so we used the extra oomph



MOONLIGHTING MARIO

Is there a genre that Mario hasn't dabbled in? No...



Mario Paint

MARIO WENT all arty-farty back in '92. His music generator remains popular on YouTube.



Yoshi's Safari

MARIO GOT trigger-happy in this Super Scope rail shooter that also featured his dinosaur sidekick.



Mario & Wario

USE THE mouse to save a bucket-headed Mario – from himself!

Dr Mario

PRESCRIPTION PADS at the ready for this pill-poppin' puzzler.

Mario No Photopi

ONLY THE Japanese got this N64 photo-manipulation package.



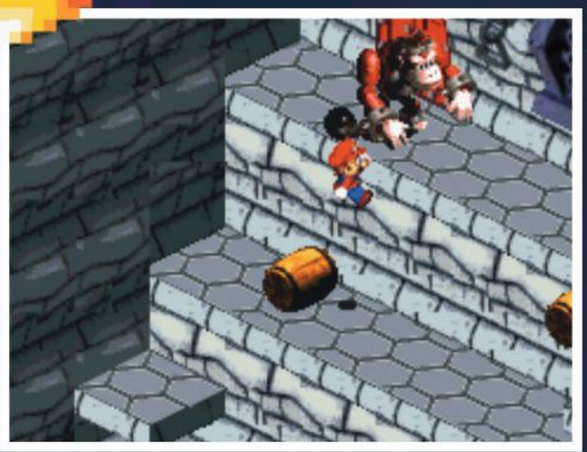
THE MAKING OF



for those calculations. It also allowed us to use more characters than usual."

The game was primarily a Square production, but Nintendo made sure the team was not left floundering with Mario's transition to a new dimension and genre. "It was a very close and favourable relationship. They offered us support with various new techniques, starting with the SA-1 chip, and ideas for presenting pseudo-3D on the Super Famicom," Fujioka recalls. "From the beginning, Mr Miyamoto came in often to meet and talk, and of course we even took to the stage together at V-Jump. I received advice from him





» [SNES] Square doffs its cap to *Donkey Kong Country*'s graphical influence here.



» [SNES] As well as all-new characters and enemies, traditional series tropes were re-imagined in new roles for *Super Mario RPG*.



» [SNES] Why does nobody respect Bowser's authoritah?

on two main points: one was keeping an eye on handling Mario's entry into the RPG world without destroying the *Mario* universe; the other was the actual concept of fun in the game – in the early stages of development, I proposed the gameplay that *Super Mario RPG* would revolve around, explaining: 'I want to achieve something that everybody wants to do, but nobody has been able to.' Mr Miyamoto approved."

Fujioka remembers another time that Miyamoto gave him advice while writing the script for moving yellow blocks in the game. Miyamoto noticed that it was possible for the player to easily slip and fall from these blocks, and suggested that Fujioka try making them stop for a split second when Mario landed. "I revised the code immediately, and the gameplay really improved. It was a great experience to be able to see first-hand Mr Miyamoto's fixation on game controls.



Super Mario RPG's cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike

"This was a difficult area – how much of the action aspect of Mario to represent in an RPG and, further, how to actually achieve that. With regards to programming and scripting, almost all the events in the game had some kind of interactive gameplay, and customising the code for them one by one was a big job. 3D data was also created for everything from the backgrounds to the characters and items, but it was our first experience with that, so it was an incredibly tough job."

Even with a 4MB cartridge and the SA-1 chip, the game was bursting at the seams: "In terms of the game's content, there's one thing that even the development staff might have forgotten about. There were plans to include a shape-shifting boss character in the second half of the game, which would morph during battle. I persuaded the coders to put together a morphing program, which they made at once. However, I've now forgotten what his original form looked like! I did prepare two sketches for this boss, but I get the feeling they were completely altered during testing." Unfortunately, at that time, it was necessary to trim many areas from the ROM capacity, and the morphing boss became nothing more than a phantom character.

"There were a good number of other early ideas that didn't make it into the final game, but it would be more accurate to say that they were starting points, rather than things we couldn't do – they changed throughout the course of developing the game. For example, we wanted to have Mario use devices in one part of the map that would have a domino effect on various devices in other parts of the map, so in the early days, 'chain reaction' was something of a keyword that we based our ideas around. Expanding from that, we got all the areas with events that focus on action."

Super Mario RPG isn't only known for its technical accomplishments, however – its cast of characters and lighthearted story and script won over gamers and critics alike. Even Mario's long-time nemesis, Bowser, was given his first comedy role. Rather than kidnapping Peach and menacing the player characters, he teams up with them and spends his time alternately weeping over his stolen castle, reciting haikus about being lonely, and trying to convince everybody that Mario has joined his gang. "Mr Miyamoto didn't stipulate

MORE MARIO RPG SPIN-OFFS

When Square got into bed with Sony, Mario's role-playing future looked uncertain. Fans were overjoyed, then, when they got not one but two spin-off series

Paper Mario



Year: 2000 **System:** N64

WITH SQUARE out of the picture, a change of title was called for, so *Super Mario RPG 2* became *Paper Mario*. Just like its forebear, this game was released late in the system's life, and showed off some striking visuals, albeit in a different way – Mario was now flat as a pancake!

Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door



Year: 2004 **System:** GameCube

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS' second game was also critically praised. It had a greater emphasis on gameplay based around the paper theme, with Mario using curses to fold himself into aeroplanes, boats and tubes. Side-scrolling sections featuring Bowser paved the way for the Wii sequel.

Super Paper Mario



Year: 2007 **System:** Wii

THE SERIES' third instalment continued to surprise gamers by toying with notions of 2D and 3D. *Super Paper Mario* returns the plumber to his platforming roots, but with a twist – the ability to switch between 2D and 3D perspectives at will. A sequel is due for the 3DS this year.

Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga



Year: 2003 **System:** Game Boy Advance

CREATED BY AlphaDream with the involvement of Fujioka, this is often regarded as the true successor to *Super Mario RPG*. Why? "Maybe because it has the same battle system, musician (Yoko Shimomura) and comical story style. It's for handhelds and features Luigi, so I think it can coexist with *Paper Mario*."

Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time



Year: 2005 **System:** Nintendo DS

AS YOU might expect, *Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time* used the dual screens to expand on Mario and Luigi's interaction from the first game. The appearance of Baby Mario and Baby Luigi allowed for puzzles requiring the co-ordination of all four characters to solve this time-travelling adventure.

Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story



Year: 2009 **System:** Nintendo DS

The latest game in the series took on an *Innerspace*-style dynamic, with the Italian duo being miniaturised and inhaled by Bowser. Will we see a fourth title in the series, possibly on the 3DS? Fujioka says: "This is still undecided. I'd be happy if we received a lot of requests to continue. Please root for us!"



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SECRET OF MANA (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: SNES
YEAR: 1993

FINAL FANTASY
SYSTEM: NES
YEAR: 1987

XENOGEARS
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998

any rules; he pretty much gave us a free hand, although he did let us know which series characters he wanted to appear," remembers Fujioka. "There were a lot of staff members who were fans of comedy and stand-up, so it was only natural that it would end up that way. Bowser's various lines and facial expressions were created freely by the people in charge of each area and event. It was all fine because Mr Miyamoto didn't get angry!"

One of the most enduring original characters to spring from the game was Geno. Although legal issues between Square and Nintendo have prevented a full-blown comeback for the wooden boy, he has maintained a cult following. "I only found out about Geno's popularity later, so I got him to make a reappearance in *Superstar Saga* [laughs]. I wish I knew why he's so popular! I think people are interested in him because he's a doll that's come to life – he seems to have something of the profound about him."

Super Mario RPG was released just months before the Nintendo 64 went on sale and was an immediate success: "It was the point at which the highest number of gamers owned a Super Famicom and, thanks to this, we sold a *lot* of copies. On the other hand, with the N64 out and Square defecting to the PlayStation, we never got to make a true sequel."

On top of this, working on Mario's last game on the SNES must have been a bittersweet experience. "We had no idea!" admits Fujioka. Indeed, when Miyamoto announced at the V-Jump Festival that the game would be Mario's final 16-bit outing, Fujioka's reaction was short and comical: "What!?"

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

THE BEST 2D ZELDA YOU'RE EVER LIKELY TO PLAY



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** ACTION/ADVENTURE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES



HISTORY

It was certainly a case of third time lucky for Nintendo's classic adventure series. After *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link* failed to capture the hearts of gamers like Link's original outing had, Shigeru Miyamoto went back to the drawing board. The end result was a truly spectacular adventure game that had everything you'd want from the genre. The story itself was excellent, involving Ganon and the kidnapping of seven descendants, one of which is Princess Zelda. Young Link must do his best to defeat the evil Ganon and restore peace to Hyrule.

He does this by traversing the huge overhead map, defeating monsters, collecting a variety of useful weapons — from slingshots to Pegasus boots — and solving a huge number of deviously designed dungeons. It's effectively following the template that worked so well for *The Legend Of Zelda* on the NES, but the 16-bit power of the SNES ensured that every aspect was far more majestic, from the gigantic bosses that Link often had to fight, to the gorgeous looking environments he explored.

By far the best part of *A Link To The Past* happens late in the game, when Link discovers the Dark World, a bleak alternate to Hyrule that is effectively a new world in itself to explore. Initially Link must traverse this dangerous environment as a rabbit, but he soon finds a way to return himself to normal and then has to zip back and fourth between the two worlds in order to properly complete his quest.

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past is a masterpiece in game design, featuring well-paced encounters, a large number of clever puzzles to solve and some of the best designed dungeons to be found in the series. It received an update for the Game Boy Advance in 2002 that included an additional multiplayer game called *Four Swords*, but we vastly prefer the SNES original. It's going to be interesting to see if its 3DS sequel *A Link Between Worlds* continues the same high standards of the SNES original.


LIFE

why you must PLAY



ACTRAISER



» **PUBLISHER:** ENIX CORPORATION
» **DEVELOPER:** QUINTET
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **FEATURED FORMAT:** SNES

QUINTET'S 16-BIT CLASSIC REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE GAMES ON THE SNES, DELIVERING A MIX OF ACTION AND SIMULATION THAT NO OTHER GAME HAS EVER BEEN ABLE TO MATCH. FAMED FOR ITS FANTASTIC AUDIO SCORE AND SUPERB LOOKING VISUALS, THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO REVISIT THIS EVERGREEN FAVOURITE. JUST DON'T TALK TOO MUCH ABOUT THE SEQUEL...

ONE SEQUEL TOO MANY

Considering how perfectly crafted the original game was you'd have expected a sequel to be even better. Sadly, *ActRaiser 2* was a huge fall from grace that wasn't a patch on its inspiration. Granted, Yuzo Koshiro's score was as good as ever and the graphics were to die for, but somewhere along the line Quintet had forgotten to include the all-important gameplay. Worst yet, the sim sections had been abandoned, meaning that *ActRaiser 2* was no different to many of the other scrolling fighters that were available. With its horrifically clunky controls, the insane difficulty and poor level design, *ActRaiser 2* is perfect proof that sometimes you can only bottle lightning once.



Games that straddle genres are always a difficult sell, so it comes as no surprise that Quintet's outrageously polished *ActRaiser* didn't find the fanbase it deserved when first released. Part scrolling slash-'em-up, part God sim, *ActRaiser* was like nothing else around upon its arrival in 1990, and three years later, when it appeared on UK shelves, it still managed to stand apart from virtually every other available SNES game.

Maybe it was the fact that it arrived three years too late, (although aesthetically it still stood head and shoulders over a great many other SNES offerings), or perhaps the mish-mash playing styles were too conflicting. Nevertheless, despite receiving praise in numerous magazines at the time, *ActRaiser* didn't exactly set the charts alight – a shame as it's a wonderfully unique experience that offers plenty of outstanding gaming moments for those willing to track it down.

It's never easy being a God and the being you control in *ActRaiser* is having a particularly hard time with his newfound divinity. The people of the world he oversees are crying out for spiritual guidance and need protecting from the many vicious monsters that your nemesis Tanzra has unleashed into the world. Only when all six realms have been secured will Tanzra's resting place finally be revealed and give you a chance of stopping your monstrous



» [SNES] Ue the power of sunshine to clear swamps and make them habitable for your followers.



» [SNES] Keep building up your lands and you'll soon be able to grow a selection of different crops. Alright... just two.



» [SNES] The Sky Palace is the home of your god and allows you to travel across the Mode 7 world.

foe once and for all, but before that happens, you've got plenty of work to occupy your divine hands.

Fortunately, you're aided throughout your adventure by an affable angel, who not only fills in the role as personal advisor, but also acts as a controllable avatar for when you're let loose in *ActRaiser*'s sim sections. Full of useful information, he'll constantly give you subtle hints to ease your progress through the game and acts as a go-between for you and your followers. He's a charming creation and by the end of the game you'll have built up quite a rapport with the little fella. It's this interaction between yourself and the game that proves to be one of *ActRaiser*'s in strengths. One section sees you rescuing a young boy called Teddy, only to be told by your angel companion at *ActRaiser*'s poignant finale that the young lad had died earlier, but you weren't told for fear of getting upset. Quintet's opus sucks you in, and despite not having a single cutscene *ActRaiser* boasts a cinematic quality that few other 16-bit titles can muster. Indeed, everything about Quintet's game is on an impressively grand scale, and as it deftly switches between genres, like a great rollercoaster, you can't help but be taken along for the ride. Well we say rollercoaster, but *ActRaiser* is more akin to a log-flume. The sim sections are equivalent to the slow steady climb to the ride's zenith while *ActRaiser*'s outrageously good battles are comparable to the flume's final dizzying drop. And like all good rides, as soon as you've finished it, you'll be instantly returning for another go.

Ah yes, the action sections. Granted, the animation might not impress like it once did, and practically every boss you face is deceptively easy to defeat, but goddamn, they're still enjoyable to play through. Crammed with amazing attention to detail, the countryside you hack and slash your way through would be the perfect place to stop for a picnic if it wasn't for the many monsters you continually face. From the lush verdant forests of Fillmore, to the icy wastes of Northwall, *ActRaiser*'s environments are breathtaking in scope and many of them (Aitos and Northwall in particular) can still draw the odd gasp of wonderment. It wasn't just the locations that had been given plenty of care and attention, as the many opponents you face off against (particularly some of the huge bosses) add to *ActRaiser*'s graphical grandeur. Animation may look rather basic

KNOW YOUR FOE

Just a few of the enemies you should look out for



BAT

Carries off followers whenever it gets the chance. Can be killed with a single shot from your angel's bow.



DRAGON

Uses lightning to destroy houses. Can be killed with two hits from your angel's bow.



IMP

Destroys crops. Can be killed with three hits from your angel's bow.



SKULLS

Creates devastating earthquakes that cripple villages. Can be killed with seven shots from your angel's bow.

"EVERYTHING ABOUT QUINTET'S GAME IS ON AN IMPRESSIVELY GRAND SCALE"

MAGICAL MOMENT

The game's not even started yet, but look how amazing the title screen is. Using the SNES's nifty Mode 7 the *ActRaiser* logo swirls around the screen to some truly excellent music. This is the stuff dreams are made of. Look at it swirling around, wooo, it's actually quite hypnotic. We could sit and watch this for hours, just losing ourselves in its silvery world.













» [SNES] Your poor followers are suffering from the plague. Surely one of the neighbouring countries has a cure?

why you must PLAY



» [SNES] The landscape may look gorgeous but it's filled with all sorts of dangers.



» [SNES] *ActRaiser*'s menu is simple in looks but wonderfully intuitive to operate.



» [SNES] *ActRaiser*'s many scrolling levels still stand up today and look absolutely beautiful.

"ACTRAISER STILL RETAINS A REFRESHING UNIQUENESS THAT ENABLES IT TO STAND PROUD AGAINST MANY OF THE SNES'S BETTER-KNOWN TITLES"

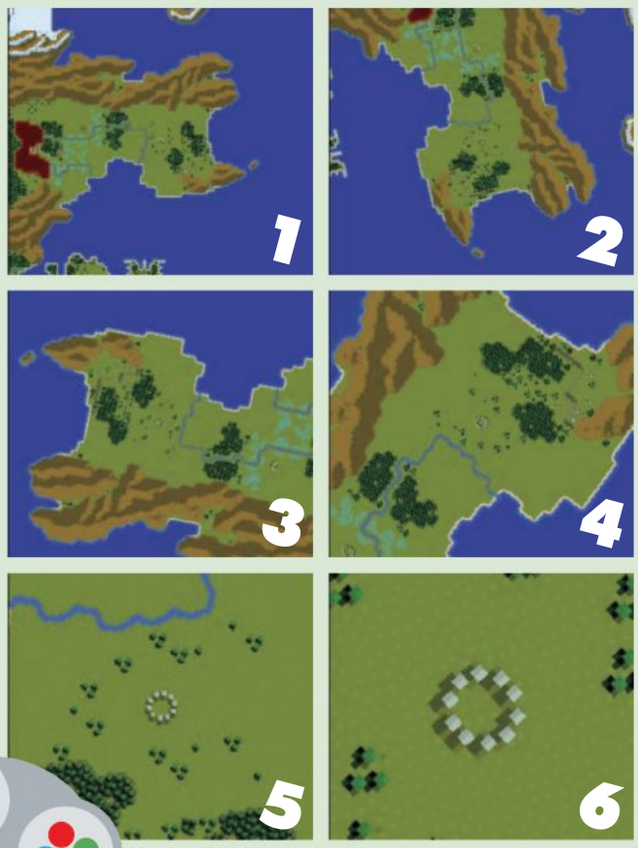
nowadays, but the sprite design featured throughout remains as strong as ever. Cute shambling apes, giant Ent-styled trees, mischievous looking gnomes and vicious lizard men may be little more than cannon-fodder for the impressively armoured knight you control, but that didn't mean that Quintet hadn't showed them any less attention than *ActRaiser*'s mayors. Axe-throwing minotaurs, flame-spewing manticores, viciously fast water dragons, heavily-armoured centaurs, *ActRaiser*'s bosses were very impressive and few will forget the last stage that sees you fighting several of them in quick succession before finally facing Tanra himself.

In truth though, *ActRaiser*'s visuals tell only half the story, as it was its stunning soundtrack that truly drove home the game's cinematic qualities. Wonderfully bombastic in its scale and featuring a stunning range of orchestral tunes, *ActRaiser* is an aural delight and its selection of beautifully varied tunes never fails to impress. From the 20th Century Fox-styled opening that accompanies the swirling title screen, to the heartrending ending (all flutes and pipes), *ActRaiser*'s music is as integral to the game as its actual gameplay and it's impossible to think of having one without the other. Of course, when you discover that *ActRaiser*'s rousing score is by Yuzo Koshiro, the legendary musician behind the likes of *Shenmue*, *Revenge Of Shinobi* and the excellent *Streets Of Rage* trilogy, everything begins to make perfect sense.

So with its stirring music, beautiful visuals and cleverly juxtaposed genres *ActRaiser* sounds very nearly perfect, and it very nearly is. The only small downside to this beautifully crafted creation is that it's a little too easy, although in another way that can actually be seen as a bonus, as it will enable you to uncover *ActRaiser*'s secrets over one long weekend. With today's RPGs being bogged down with lengthy cutscenes and monotonous levelling up, finding a game like *ActRaiser* that can be completed so quickly is truly refreshing. The relative speed with which you can play through *ActRaiser* must be levelled at its six sim sections, as they are extremely simplistic in their execution and require you to do little more than level the surrounding countryside with a selection of different powers (lightning, rain, or later earthquakes) while laying the ground work for your followers to build on and shoot any nearby monsters. While your subjects continually pester you with requests, most

REMEMBER WHEN?

Some of the most jaw-dropping moments in *ActRaiser* occur when you're about to enter a new battle. Beginning high above the Mode 7 landscape you zoom towards the ground, which continually rotates on your approach. As your descent continues, a slowly building orchestra sounds off in the background. It's a breathtaking scene that still impresses today.





» [SNES] When things aren't going well your followers will soon give you a sign.



» [SNES] Now this is tricky. The screen continually scrolls forward, so you really need to be on your guard.

LOCATION, LOCATION

ActRaiser's environments are many and varied…

FILLMORE

Your quest begins in the delightful land of Fillmore. While most of its countryside consists of rolling pastures there are a fair few trees that make building roads difficult. A quick blast of lightning soon solves this particular problem though.



BLOODPOOL

The swamp infested Bloodpool gets its name from the deep red of its largest lake. You discover that the large expanse of water is being poisoned by monsters, but how are you going to stop them and restore the lake to its former glory?



KASANDORA

Living in Kasandora appears impossible as it's filled with a huge expanse of inhospitable desert. Fortunately, you can summon up large quantities of rain to flush most of it away, meaning that your followers can soon rebuild new homes.



AITOS

The region of Aitos is similar to Kasandora in that it requires a lot of effort to enable your followers to live there. Use gusts of wind to keep their windmills turning and they will reward you with the wool they gather from the region's sheep.



MARAHNA

A humid jungle that requires plenty of lightning blasts to destroy the island's many trees. You'll also be required to create an earthquake later in the game, so make sure you don't build too many homes near the targeted area…



NORTHWALL

The biggest problem you'll have at Northwall is that it's too cold for many of your villagers to work in. Surely one of your other countries has a way of keeping them warm… It also features one of the hardest stages in the game.



tasks require you to do little more than travel to an adjacent town and pick up an item that your current villagers are unable to create. Of course, with *ActRaiser* straddling two vastly different genres, neither of them were going to be as complex as a game that focused on a single playing style, so Quintet's linear approach can be somewhat justified. It also means that you can quickly race through the town building sections and return to the side-scrolling hack-fests – it should come as no surprise to learn that Quintet includes a "Professional Mode" that cuts out the sim building entirely and simply allows you to play all 12 of *ActRaiser*'s glorious levels.

Even after 23 years *ActRaiser* retains a refreshing uniqueness that enables it to stand proud against many of the SNES's better-known titles. The fact that many of you are unlikely to have played it the first time around should help make its discovery all the sweeter.



» [SNES] The final showdown, but are you up for the task ahead?

BEASTLY BOSSES

Just a few of *ActRaiser*'s bosses and how to defeat them

CENTAUR KNIGHT

The first boss may be huge but he's easy to kill. Duck under his attack and then get in a quick counter hit. When he fires his lightning attack, run to the far right of the screen.



WIZARD

Stay at a distance to avoid his fire. When he lands on the bottom right, run over to score four hits on him. He'll turn into a werewolf, but just constantly hit him and he'll keel over.



ICE WYVERN

Wait for him to fire ice at you then run away from him. Eventually he'll come to a stop, so manoeuvre behind him to get in a few solid strikes. Rinse, lather, and repeat…



GOLDEN PHARAOH

His eyes will indicate when he drops down, so stay out of his way. Once he's landed you can hit him and all you have to do is jump over the laser he fires and repeat the process.



IMPORT ONLY



UMIHARA KAWASE

INFO

» **PUBLISHER:** TNN
» **DEVELOPER:** ATELIER DOUBLE
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SUPER FAMICOM
» **ALSO ON:** DS
» **GENRE:** PUZZLE/PLATFORMER
» **RELEASED:** 1994
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £60+ ($90+)

EVOLUTION OF THE GENRE

▲ Retro



BIONIC COMMANDO
RELEASED: **1987**
The granddaddy of the grappling platformer, *Bionic Commando* is more action-orientated than *Umihara Kawase*, and features soldiers in place of fish and a bionic telescopic arm instead of a lively fishing rod.

▼ Modern



BIONIC COMMANDO
RELEASED: **2009**
This superb 3D reboot of the *Bionic Commando* franchise nails the thrill of swinging and blasting through the air brilliantly. Enjoyable and challenging, it also has a rocking soundtrack, too. Track this awesome version down and play it until you love it like we do.

» We cast our line into the deep sea of import titles and pluck out Umihara Kawase, a Super Famicom platformer that tastes like Bionic Commando cooked in delicious Spirited Away batter



» [SNES] The world of *Umihara Kawase* is a bit bonkers, and is made up of sea creatures, black and white photographs, and even giant school stationary.

Developed by a little-known studio and released sole-ly (that's it for the fish puns, promise) in Japan, *Umihara Kawase* has become something of a cult Super Famicom title, thanks to the internet. Indeed, you might have seen its name crop up on a few retro gaming sites about obscure SNES gems, or even the odd best import games list. It's the Super Famicom platformer with the fishing rod-brandishing schoolgirl and giant fish patrolling its stages.

The premise of *Umihara Kawase* isn't all that clear. In fact if we had to come up with one to best give explanation to its zany gameplay, we'd say it's probably about a teenage girl with the world's most elasticised fishing rod, experiencing a rather nasty night terror after stuffing a pongy prawn sandwich down her throat. The consequent dream/nightmare/bizarre hallucination episode that she experiences finds her having to work through a series of whimsical stages to reach exit doors positioned in annoying-to-reach areas.

With levels featuring plenty of long gaps and death pits between platforms, you use the fishing rod as a grappling hook to get around. By aiming the rod with the D-pad, you can swing and manoeuvre yourself around the level. You can also pull yourself up by reeling in the line or lower yourself by letting it out. It's a mechanic that works well and is where pretty much all the appeal of *Umihara Kawase* comes from, but it does take a bit of practice to get the hang of, so prepare for a bit of wrestling with the controls initially as you battle to get yourself in the precise position needed to help you continue with your journey. And to make matter worse, the levels are occupied by large fish, eels and crustaceans that just seem to appear and disappear at random. You can hit these enemies with your fishing hook to temporarily stun them, and in this stasis they become safe to reel in and stick in your pink rucksack.

Despite its steep learning curve, those moments when you do perform an impressive feat of fishing line swinging to make it to the section of the stage you

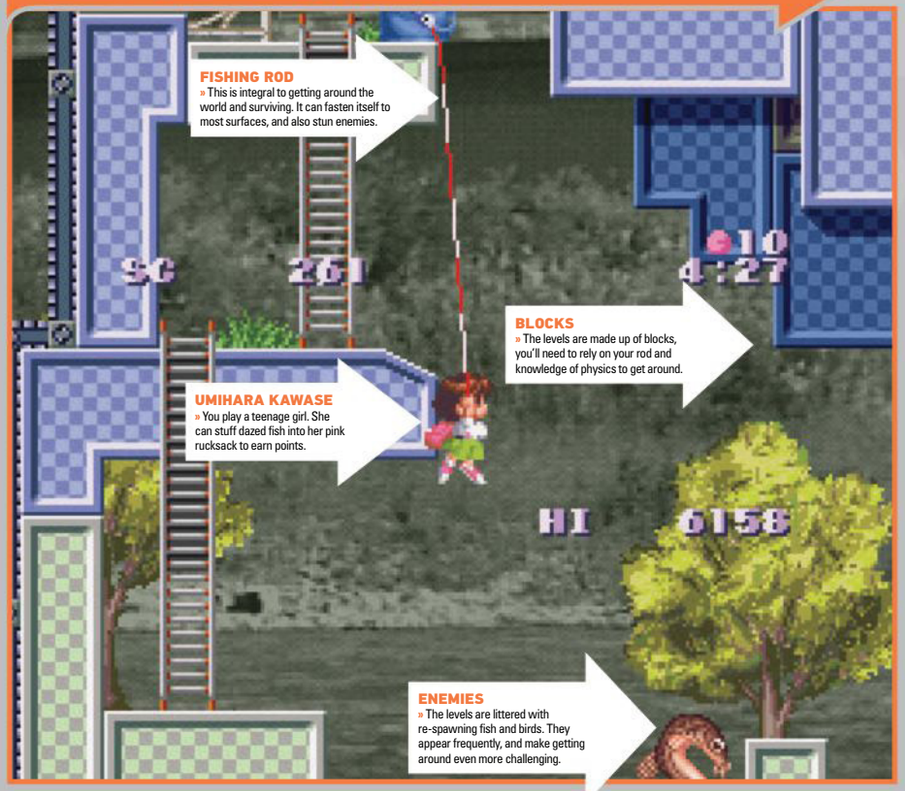


» [SNES] The puzzle stages are interrupted by occasional boss encounters. Sadly this fish is too large to stun so you'll need to come up with another way to reach the exit.



» [SNES]There are loads of different rod techniques you can use to get around, and completing the game will require mastery of them all.

GO DEEPER A Fishing Lesson



"It's the Super Famicom platformer with the fishing rod-brandishing schoolgirl"

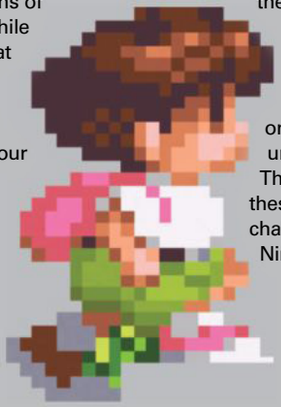
want is when the brilliance of *Umihara Kawase* comes to the surface. There's a real sense of achievement felt whenever you finish a level. Also, because of the way in which the stages are designed, and the fact your line will fasten itself to pretty much any surface, there are multiple ways to finish them too. Moreover, there are also a nice variety of clever little line-casting techniques to master too, and as you make progress you learn that later levels have been designed in such a way that you will need to rely on them all.

Though the sprites look nice and detailed, *Umihara Kawase* certainly isn't the prettiest game to grace the Super Famicom. If we're honest, its world is actually a little on the bland side. Backgrounds are made up of badly digitised black and white photographs of deserted beaches and rocky cliff bottoms, while levels are constructed from simple blocks that would look more at home in an 8-bit puzzler. With that said, it's not like you've really got time to take in the sights anyway, as the environment is just too dangerous to avert your eyes from your character for even a second.

Despite never migrating from Japanese shores, *Umihara Kawase* was popular enough to receive a sequel. *Umihara Kawase Shun*, which appeared on PlayStation, gave the series a bit of a makeover while its gameplay was leveraged more towards the puzzle feel of the original. It also featured isometric-ish 3D levels, a change that many fans argued made navigating the environment more difficult, and a shorter and thus springier fishing line too. A second edition of the game was also later released that made a few gameplay improvements and subtle changes to the visuals and presentation.

The series then went portable with the release of *Umihara Kawase Portable* on PSP in Japan. Based predominantly on *Shun*, it was developed by Rocket Studio and with no involvement from series creator Kiyoshi Sakai. However, Sakai did return to oversee the release of *Umihara Kawase DS*, an anthology for the DS of both the original *Umihara Kawase* and its sequel *Umihara Kawase Shun*.

If you enjoy your games with a side order of physics-based mechanics, we urge you to seek out *Umihara Kawase*. Though copies aren't cheap to buy these days, it is certainly one of the most challenging and quirky platformers found on Nintendo's 16-bit console.





CAN'T IMPORT? YOU COULD TRY



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY'S KONG QUEST

» A challenging platformer with cutesy cartoon visuals and gameplay that requires a bit of brainpower to get around (in this instance deciding when best to use the distinct abilities of Diddy and Dixie), Rare's sequel to *Donkey Kong Country*, which many fans regard as the best in the series, is a tasty red meat alternative to *Umihara Kawase*'s fishy dish.

THE MAKING OF



Hoeing, planting, watering, harvesting and a little bit of courtship. It's all in a day's work for Kim Wild, who tracks down Yasuhiro Wada and talks about the popular farm simulator

There are many videogame franchises that have existed over more than a handful of games, but the vast majority revolve around a main character such as Sonic, Mario, Mega Man and even Solid Snake. Few series survive around a basic idea or concept without having a mascot at the helm, yet this is the case for *Harvest Moon*, which has an ever-changing world of characters in each iteration. It's a peaceful, gentle look at the world of farming that encourages playfulness as much as it does creativity, where danger is an unknown concept and violence is forbidden. If joy and happiness could be bottled, then *Harvest Moon* could become an even greater money-making commodity.

Yasuhiro Wada, creator of *Harvest Moon* and director of the series, first became involved with the videogame industry in Tokyo: "At the time, I thought games would be the cutting edge in entertainment, so I applied to a job ad, and got hired!"

A keen games player in his youth, in particular *The Legend Of Zelda*, Wada takes considerable inspiration from Nintendo's output: "I wouldn't say there is always someone who inspires me for each game, but as a creator I have great respect for



IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** NATSUME

» **DEVELOPER:** PACK-IN-VIDEO

» **PLATFORM:** SNES

» **RELEASED:** 1996

Will Wright and Shigeru Miyamoto. However, when I get set to come up with game ideas, I make sure to always take concepts from things that aren't related to games."

After spending years working on PC Engine games as a production assistant, Wada would begin a draft for *Bokujo Monogatari* (*Ranch Story*) that originated from living in the countryside. "I wanted to make something that hadn't existed before," he says. "That was the source of my inspiration. At the time, it seemed like games were all about fighting or competition. So, I decided to make a game without fighting and without competition."

Farming, however, is just a small part of *Harvest Moon*'s charm. You have a life to develop, as well as having to attend to your expanding lifestock. From befriending the locals, attending events, expanding your home, there's always something to involve you, including the prospect of love. "The original concept included not just the farming element, but also the element of life simulation, so romance and marriage was not something we could really leave out," explains Wada. "In the concept you could choose from several partners, and if you fulfilled certain conditions you could get married and have a child. This was included in the concept from a very early stage in the development of the first *Harvest Moon*."

> "I decided to make a game without fighting and without competition"

While a certain amount of research went into the factual side of farming, many elements were discarded in favour of fun. "When we first started developing *Harvest Moon*, of course we had to research that side, but the concept of *Harvest Moon* was never to be a 'farming' simulation. Instead, it is a 'country living' simulation," says Wada. "As we designed the game, we greatly simplified it, so there are some things that will feel a bit different from reality. We wanted to create a world reminiscent of alpine Europe, sprinkled with machines and inventions and fantasy such as the Harvest Goddess. Quite simply, our main reason for this was that we felt this type of world would be attractive, but this is a fantasy world where there are no predators to devour your livestock, and breeding is done with potions."

What makes *Harvest Moon* all the more appealing is the anime and fairytale style it has to its appearance. "I created this style while debating with the designer," explains Wada. "I decided that I wanted to create a world that was a mix of European alpine dairy land and a bizarre world like that of Akira Toriyama's *Dr Slump*." While huge elements of the game's style do get written down, the overall design comes about through an interchange of ideas: "We do indeed map out our ideas, but we have more documents than anything like a blueprint. The designers and programmers work from those documents and exchange ideas. Finally, we create the final look of the game based on the designer's ideas." This process also applies to the creation of the characters that are so engaging to interact with: "We decide on certain character types at an early stage, and the concept designer fleshes them out from there. An example would be a 'sister-type with spectacles', or a 'poster girl for the pub'. It's quite vague, but we try to avoid having these types overlap as we sketch them out."

For all its ideals, the development of *Harvest Moon* itself ran into considerable difficulties. The external developer that helped with production went bankrupt, while the main team faced major restructuring. "The first *Harvest Moon* took us three and a half years," recalls Wada. "Two years into it, our ten-man development team was disbanded once, and only the main members of



» [SNES] This is what happens when you mix your drinks at the office party.



» [SNES] Fishing is a useful way to earn extra money while waiting for crops to grow.

THE MAKING OF



» [SNES] When you first get the farm, there is a lot of debris to sort through.



» [Wii] *Rune Factory Frontier* on the Wii is a new change in direction for the series and is a fantastic addition to the franchise.



» [SNES] Sound advice for courting the ladies. Regular gifts also help.

that team stayed on. In the end we finished it up with an incredibly small team of just those three."

When it came to the release of the game, the title changed from *Ranch Story* to the now-familiar *Harvest Moon*. Although the release of the game in Europe came quite late into the Super Nintendo's lifespan, with it hitting our shores in 1998, it still managed to build up a following and planted the seeds for the franchise to grow. Not only did it become a hit among players, but it also went on to receive accolades from the media, showering it with praise for its unique style.

"Initially in Japan we only sold about 20,000," says Wada, "but we got some good reviews and word spread. In the end we broke 100,000 sales. The game was then localised for the US and EU, and went on to sell just as well in those territories." The limited print run of the SNES game means it is highly sought after by collectors, although the four *Harvest Moon* episodes released through Japan's Satellaview satellite modem service for the Super Famicom in 1996 are the most collectable and elusive ones of all.

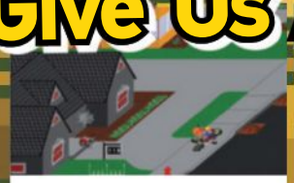
As a concept, the series has progressed significantly, yet there are still areas of life that Wada is keen to explore. "At the very beginning I was quite torn between having more 'real' elements such as divorce and predation," he explains. "Also, I'd like to beef up some of the simulation elements such as the development you see in *Island Of Happiness* and *Magical Melody*. That's something I'd like to make a reality."

One of the main difficulties for each game, particularly for Europe, is the aspect of translation, as Wada explains: "It takes six months to a year, depending on the volume of text. It is especially difficult to make the European version because we localise into many languages. I think we will be able to streamline the process as we've become more experienced." It's something that becomes increasingly noticeable between each console release, and explains why it takes so long for us to catch up with America and Japan, while some games in the series don't even make the journey. Infuriating as it is from the perspective of a gamer – Japan is about to experience *Rune Factory 3*, part of the spin-off fantasy series, on the Nintendo DS, while we are only just reaching the second – translating each game is something of an undertaking. Cultural differences are also an area that have to be considered – while the *Harvest Moon* games in Japan think nothing of serving alcohol as refreshments, North American versions of the game have to settle for juice instead.

> **"We wanted to create a world reminiscent of alpine Europe, sprinkled with machines and inventions and fantasy"**

The series has gone from strength to strength, made all the more evident by the fact that there are 19 – yes, really – games released and counting. As a result, the franchise has flourished on multiple consoles, including the N64, PlayStation, PS2, PSP, Game Boy Color, Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, GameCube and Wii. While this has meant that it has suffered from over-familiarity, recent entries such as *Rune Factory* on the DS and the Wii have proven that it is still possible to keep the franchise fresh by adding in some new ingredients. *Rune Factory* combines farming with RPG elements that see you battling monsters and

Give Us A Job



PAPERBOY

Have you ever fancied a paper round but didn't like the idea of the exercise or being exposed to rainy weather? Then this is the game for you. With hazards to avoid, subscribers to deliver to, new customers to attract and an obstacle course, can you last all week?



TAPPER

Tom Cruise may have made bartending glamorous in *Cocktail*, but it sure isn't easy. Serve the beers to the punters before they get angry in this arcade classic, and don't forget to clear up the empties when they have finished. If you're lucky, you may even earn yourself a nice tip.



POSTMAN PAT

Yes, the graphics haven't aged well and the handling isn't as smooth as we remember it, but there is something that's still endearing about this game and the world of *Postman Pat*, and we have spent many a happy hour delivering mail to the villagers. At least this mail man won't go on strike.



TRASHMAN

It's a rubbish job, but someone's got to do it! At least with this Spectrum classic, an otherwise smelly occupation can be enjoyed from your own home. Collect each dustbin, then empty and replace before time runs out, making sure to avoid dogs and kids, who are out to slow you down.



CRAZY TAXI

Although there have been many games available focused on the world of taxiing, it's this Dreamcast classic that keeps us coming back for more. Chaotic driving, taking short cuts and delivering customers to their destination is the most fun you can have in charge of a speeding vehicle. Taxi!





» [SNES] All crops need to be watered daily if they are to grow into vegetables.

finding old relics. The series' change in direction is part of Wada's plan to prevent the quality of the gameplay dipping. "*Harvest Moon* is the main pillar of our business," he affirms, "but if we relied too much on it there would be a chance that the quality would decline. These two titles came about from an idea to let some important game creators make use of the *Harvest Moon* system, and thereby achieve a balance between the creative and business aspects while maintaining the quality of the series and spreading out releases."

Of all the *Harvest Moon* games that exist, though, surely Wada has a favourite? "I don't have my heart set on any one platform, but personally I am most fond of *Harvest Moon 64*. I really love *A Wonderful Life*, and more recently, *Animal Parade*, coming to Europe soon."

What is the secret to the series' success? "I don't know," admits the creator. "Of course, I made it with the hope that it would bring happiness to many people, but I honestly didn't think it would last this long. My hunch is that there aren't many other games like it."

The videogame industry has changed considerably since the early days of the Super Nintendo and is something that Wada has come to notice with regret: "Speaking about the industry as a whole, just too much has changed to list it all. Currently, the industry is split between a small number of very hardcore games, and an ocean of too casual games. Anything in between those extremes is going to face difficulties in becoming successful. It's the old problem of the chicken and the egg. I don't know what caused this, but as time goes on, I've seen many publishers merge and small studios have become obsolete. As a result, it has become more difficult to get novel titles made, and the selection available to players has shrunk. It's a very difficult situation." It's a sad fact that has greatly affected developer Natsume, which has had to abandon more original concepts due to financial constraints.

But with so many games currently available and even more in the pipeline, where does Wada feel the future lies? "The future lies in creating the ultimate social simulation, something in which both beginners and veteran players can discover their own pleasure. In order to provide the most enjoyable experience to as many players as possible, there are many problems to overcome. From there, I would like to evolve the series little by little over time." And for the next project? "I wish I could fill you in on all the ideas I'm working on right now, but I really can't tell you just yet," he answers cryptically.

We are confident that regardless of what those ideas prove to be, *Harvest Moon* will forever remain proof of the fact that innocent, non-violent and charming games have a place within an industry that seems intent on filling itself with guns and destruction at every turn.



Girl Power

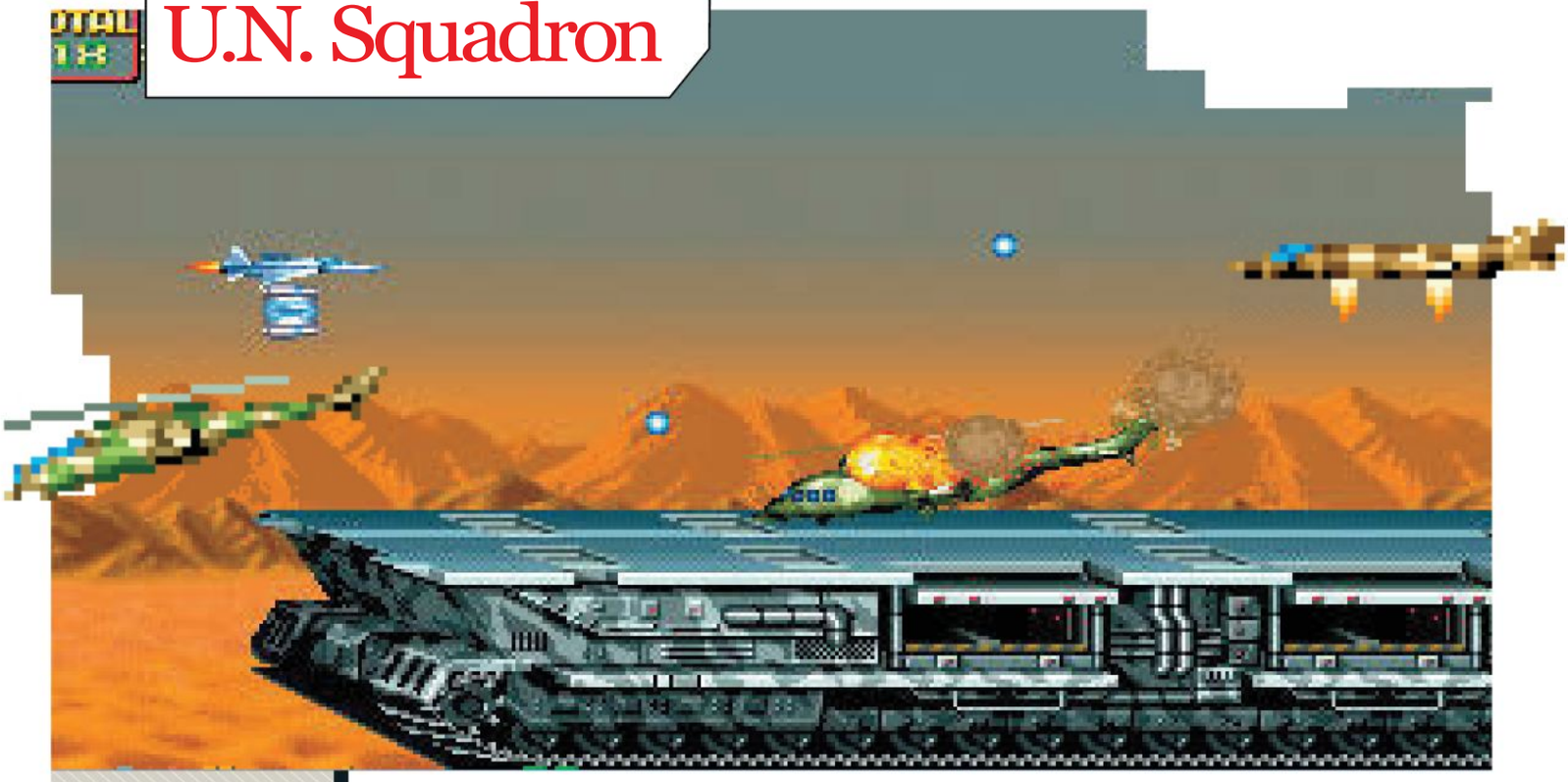
WHEN *HARVEST MOON* became more successful and it appealed to a wider audience, it became apparent that there was one area that was lacking: the ability to be a female farmer. Natsume picked up on this desire and started to release editions catering to this new demographic. The most obvious ones include *More Friends Of Mineral Town* on the Game Boy Advance and *Another Wonderful Life* for the GameCube, which were the originals remoulded so you could play as a girl and have potential husbands. Sadly, none of these titles were released in Europe, and when the GameCube classic *Magical Melody* received a Wii conversion – the original featured both sexes as well as all possible partner choices – the option to play as a female farmer and all that entailed was mysteriously removed. Both gender choices have been re-introduced in *Tree Of Tranquility* and the more recent DS titles.







U.N. Squadron



Instant Expert

The game is known as *Area 88* in Japan, and is based on a manga series of the same name.

***U.N. Squadron* was** directed by Kihaji Okamoto, who designed *Forgotten Worlds*, *Three Wonders* and *Side Arms - Hyper Dyne*.

Capcom released a sequel, *Carrier Air Wing*, in 1990. Outside of Japan it is known as *US Navy*. It's famous for featuring a character that resembles Sean Connery.

***U.N. Squadron* was** ported to the Spectrum, C64, Amstrad and Amiga. These conversions were developed and published by U.S Gold, except for the Amiga version, which was developed by Tiertex Design Studios.

The *Area 88* Manga series ran between 1979 and 1986 and was one of the first to receive English translation. It was later adapted into a video and anime series.

There are a number of differences between the arcade and SNES conversion – different weapons and aircraft and the removal of a two-player mode.

On the SNES the character Mickey Simon is renamed/misspelled 'Mickey Scymon'. Ought to have really been 'Skyman', we think .

The excellent sequel, *Carrier Air Wing*, was never converted to any console or computer.

Stuart Hunt invites you to buckle up, take aim, and take off into the danger zone with Capcom's blistering war-based shooter U.N. Squadron. But before all that, let's begin with a lengthy mission briefing...

In the Eighties, shoot-'em-ups had dominated amusement arcades, and a large proportion had a science fiction theme. A relationship that can be traced to Taito's seminal 1978 smash *Space Invaders*, subsequent iconic arcade releases such as *R-Type* and *Gradius* further helped enrich sci-fi's prominence within the genre, and the two have remained close bedfellows ever since.

With hindsight, it comes as no surprise that many game designers saw sci-fi as such an attractive theme to base their games around; it gave their creativity carte blanche to go wild. Want your bulbous spaceship to do battle against something with a robotic exoskeleton head and the body of an armadillo? In the realm of sci-fi, anything is possible. Therefore, when a more po-faced war-based shooter came along that supplanted the spaceships for fighter planes and Bydo Empires with simply more fighter planes, it understandably looked a little bit dull by comparison.

In 1989 though, Capcom released a war shooter that oozed quality, epic bosses and such high levels of graphic finesse that it was impossible not to take notice. Of course, Capcom already had one successful fleet of plane-based shooters already on its books with its *19XX* series. Debuting in 1984 with the game *1942*, the vertical shooter became one of the developer's most popular arcade genres in the Eighties. It is understandable that Capcom felt it could capture lightning twice.

Capcom adds a little bit of manga magic

Unquestionably helping *U.N. Squadron*'s popularity soar even further was the fact that it was based on a rather splendid manga series titled *Area 88* (which is also *U.N. Squadron*'s Japanese title). Created by the esteemed Kaoru Shintani, it is the Japanese mangaka's most famous work, and is notable for being one of the first Japanese comic books to receive a Western translation.

The series' faintly comic story told the tale of a promising pilot named Shin Kazama whose life takes an unfortunate turn. Enjoying his place as the top student in a prestigious flight school, and dating the pretty daughter of a wealthy airline president, Shin's world is turned upside down after he is fooled by a jealous friend into signing up for three years' service at a mercenary air force base known as Area 88. Deciding to work his socks off so that he can buy his way out of the contract, Shin soon discovers that he is a natural fighter pilot. With his talents not going unnoticed by his bosses, Shin climbs the ranks inside the base, while a battle of moral principles is sparked inside the pilot as he grows to despise all the killing he's forced to do, but understands that it might be his only ticket home.

The game adaptation takes the form of a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up that is split into ten devilishly tricky stages. The underlining mission sees you trying to

Pixel Perfect

The war machines of U.N. Squadron get shoved up your arsenal…



» Pick-up



» Air Mine



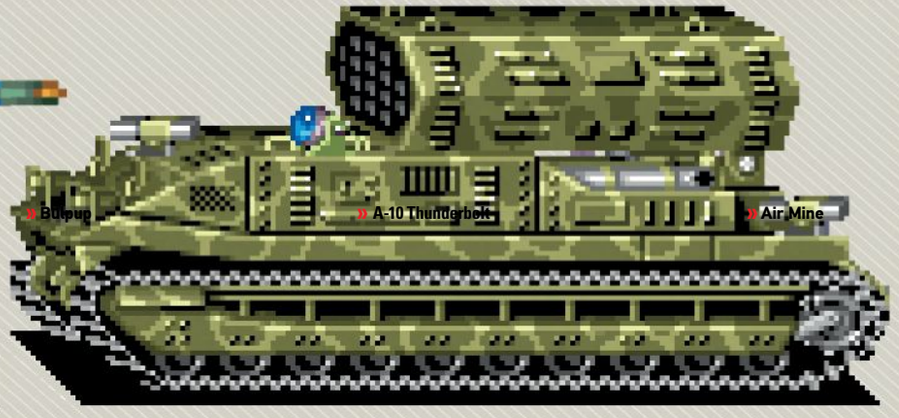
» Large Fighter



» Large Turret



» Camo Fighter



» Bulpug » A-10 Thunderbolt » Air Mine



» Power-up

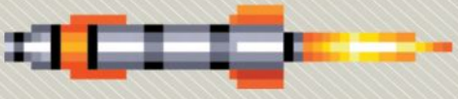


» Red AA Tank

» Multi-Rocket Launcher



» Tank



» Enemy Rocket



» Shield



» Camo Helicopter



» Bullhead



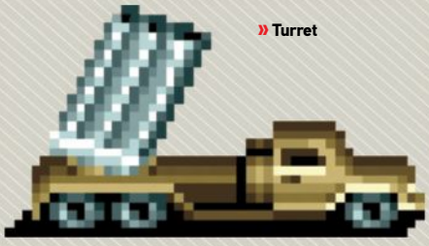
» Turret



» Red Helicopter



» Large Helicopter



» Missile Truck



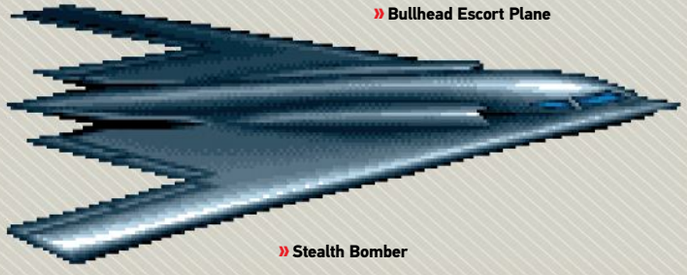
» Bullhead Escort Plane



» Flame Turret



» Desert Tank



» Stealth Bomber

Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought...



"Featuring knockout graphics, stunning sound, superlative gameplay and a tough challenge, U.N. Squadron (or Area 88 in Japan) is one of the best blasters available on any system"

– MEAN MACHINES , ISSUE 12

Twin Galaxies High Scores

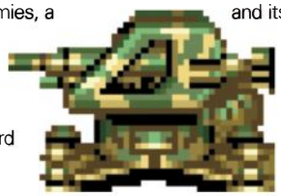
ARCADE (SINGLE-PLAYER)
- **NAME:** DWAYNE RICHARD
- **POINTS:** 1,960,400

MAME (SINGLE-PLAYER)
- **NAME:** RUDY CHAVEZ
- **POINTS:** 1,439,050

prevent a tyrannous organisation known as Project 4 from seizing control of Area 88 – the last bastion for the good guys – and ultimately taking over the world, or something along those lines. You are giving the option to control one of three characters: Shin, Shin's friend US pilot Mickey Simon, and Greg Gates, a Danish freelance pilot/Mario lookalike who provides comic relief in the manga series. Each pilot has a signature plane with unique fire type. Shin's F-20 Tigershark can only fire forward, as can Mickey's F-14 – though it fires bullets at a slower rate that are larger in size – while Greg's A-10 Thunderbolt has the slowest and weakest main fire of the three planes but can simultaneously fire at the ground at 45 degrees – extremely handy for wiping out ground targets.

Power-Up!

U.N. Squadron also featured an array of weapon upgrades and power-ups to add an element of customisation. In similar fashion to earlier shooters such as *Fantasy Zone* and Capcom's own *Forgotten Worlds*, these items were purchasable and made available via an item shop. With selection limited to the amount of money you had successfully banked in the game, earned by shooting down enemies, a degree of strategy came from you weighing up whether to buy up what you could afford at the start of each stage, or save your money so you could splash out on the more expensive armaments later.





» [Arcade] *U.N. Squadron* was ace in two-player, making it all the more odd that the mode was omitted from the SNES version..

U.N. Squadron ran on Capcom's all-singing, all-dancing CP System (CPS-1). The cart-based arcade hardware powered some of the developer's biggest arcade hits, including *Final Fight*, *Strider*, *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Street Fighter II*, and *U.N. Squadron* is a particularly great showcase for its power. Its levels are crammed with detail, there are loads of enemy types, and its gargantuan bosses stretched multiple screens. The backgrounds also featured multiple layers of parallax scrolling, often with little to no slowdown.

U.N. Squadron was a popular arcade game but became a household name when it was converted to the Super Nintendo. An early release for Nintendo's 16-bit console, on first inspection the port looks faithful, but Capcom made a number of tweaks to the gameplay, the most notable of which saw all three pilots no longer tied to one plane, with purchasable aircraft unlocked as you progressed, and players given the freedom to decide the order they attacked some levels. It also added new weapons and power-ups to the mix, as well as bonus rounds that saw the pilots destroying a convoy of enemy supply trucks to earn bonus points. Finally, and to the chagrin of fans, Capcom also made the game single-player only, as it had controversially done with *Final Fight*. It remains a stunning SNES port.

Power-ups

Guns, guns, guns. And more guns. Here's our rundown of the full weapons in U.N. Squadron



»Bulpup
Launches powerful missiles straight ahead. This is your first weapon upgrade.



»Bulpup II
Basically an enhanced version of the Bulpup – the missiles are more powerful.



»Phoenix
A useful weapon, it releases powerful missiles that home in on enemy craft.



»Falcon
An upgraded version of the Phoenix, its missiles create more damage.



»Super Shell
Fires a fast concentrated stream of shells ahead of the plane.



»Super Shell II
Okay, this is just getting silly now – an upgraded Super Shell.



»Bomb II
Enables your plane to drops bombs and effectively take down ground targets.



»Napalm
Works in a similar way to Bomb II, but impact creates a trail of flames.



»Round Laser
Fires a powerful and large ring of fire. It's one of the most effective weapons in the game.



»16-way Shot
A defensive weapon that unleashes a shield of bullets that surround the plane.

Memorable Moments

We rocket through the bits of U.N Squadron that were planely the best

The U.N. trifecta

Having the option to select different crafts was nothing new to shooter gaming, but in *U.N. Squadron* the feature is done really well, with each pilot given their own personality, and individual fire types that make them stand out from each other.





Upgrades

Before the start of each mission, you visit this guy. He's basically Area 88's Q, and fixes you up with various weapon and power upgrades. There is a charge for his services though. Those Area 88 bigwigs are tightwads.



Taxing tank

The first stage takes place at a radar installation. It's a cheery-looking stage, but don't be fooled into thinking it settles you in slowly; it's a challenging opener, and ends with the pilots battling this massive missile-launching tank.



Capcom's black bomber

The second stage ends with a battle against a stealth bomber, which, judging by its mass beside our ship can't be all that stealthy. A better-proportioned version of this boss featured on the game's US flyer.



Bring a wingman

U.N. Squadron really comes alive when you're playing with a friend. You can live out your Maverick and Iceman fantasies without anyone thinking it weird. Well, less weird. Shame the SNES version forces you to fly solo.



The forestry decommission

The end of stage three sees the pilots trying to destroy an enemy base forged deep in the heart of a forest. One of the more challenging bosses in the game, you're repeatedly forced to fly over the base until its main cannon is destroyed.



Grand canyon

Mission 5 takes place in a gorgeous canyon that does a splendid job of showing off the impressive amount of parallax scrolling there is in the game. Try not to become too distracted by the pretty views though.



Cave glory

Stage 6 sees the pilots entering a cave base to destroy a huge missile launcher deep inside. The tight corridors and falling rocks in this stage make it one of the trickiest missions in the game.



The sub standard

A large submarine emerges from the depths of the ocean. Thankfully, it's a sensible size and doesn't pose much of a problem. The same cannot be said for the boss of this stage, however – a heavily armed battleship.



Bydo frigape

The final boss is an incredibly tough nut to crack. Strikingly similar to the iconic frigate in *R-Type* – even the way you attack it is similar, as you have to reach its energy core – the entire level takes the form of an epic boss battle.



SNES-sational

The SNES conversion certainly looked to be a faithful version of *U.N. Squadron*, but a play reveals that Capcom made a number of fundamental changes to the gameplay, including slightly different/altered levels.

After nine intense stages, the final mission sees Shin, Mickey and Greg trying to decommission Project 4's giant air fortress. It's an epic boss fight that recalls R-Type's iconic frigate stage. After the battle, U.N. Squadron flashes up a number of different end animations, depending on the collection of a hidden pick-up – unlocked by achieving certain criteria – in each level.







Enemy Briefing

Three pretty good words to best describe *U.N. Squadron*'s bosses are: monolithic mechanical monstrosities. Dwarfing our heroes' planes by a considerable margin, if Project 4's armada of ships, planes and fortresses isn't filling up screen space – and basically giving your plane very little room to manoeuvre – they're formidable forms stretching across several screens, requiring a combination of grit, patience and dextrous flying to defeat. Here's our guide to the ten enemy targets in the game.

STAGE 1 THE MULTI-ROCKET LAUNCHER

The first boss in the game is this gargantuan missile launcher. It might look to be an imposing opening boss but it's actually quite easy to defeat. Not only does it hold its position at the far right of the screen but its only means of attack are standard and homing rockets. Therefore this big blighter can be eradicated with some simple up-and-down flying while holding down the fire button. Hint: fly up when he's firing rockets, fly back down when he's not.

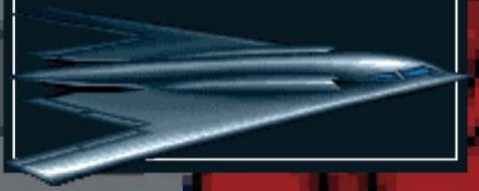
Difficulty rating:



STAGE 2 STEALTH BOMBER

The 'invisible stealth bomber', as you can clearly see from this screenshot, isn't actually invisible. In fact, given its huge size we'd argue that it's bloody uber-visible. Anyway, this second stage boss doesn't pose too many headaches – if you're quick at taking it down, that is. You see all those things in the sky that look like Chinese Lanterns? They're floating mines dropped into the sky by the bomber, and collision with them is deadly. Therefore a good tactic is to initially concentrate on avoiding the mines rather than precision firing on the target, but then immediately switch tactic the second it starts to fire off indestructible missiles: basically at this point you want to take it out as quickly as you can.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 3 FOREST FORTRESS

This is the point at which the difficulty of *U.N. Squadron* steps up a gear. The boss of this stage takes the form of a huge enemy base armed to the teeth with turrets that are in turn armed to the teeth with rockets. The most annoying sections of the base are the two large laser-firing turrets that bookend the weak spot of the facility. To destroy the base you actually only need to take out the core. As soon as it appears on screen, hammer it with everything you've got. Two low-pass flybys should provide you with enough time to seal the deal.



Difficulty rating:

STAGE 4 CARRIER

This target is basically just an aircraft carrier, but with one interesting difference: it travels on land rather than sea. Yep, those crazy chaps at Project 4 have successful mated a tank with an aircraft carrier, and the zany result is this. It's another one of *U.N. Squadron*'s long bosses, and it attacks by letting off fighter planes and missiles straight up in the air, which are a bugger to dodge. In any case, you must either dodge or shoot down its attacks until you reach the thing that looks like a muscle car engine. Unleash everything you've got at this and this land-based supership will promptly sink into a sandy grave.



Difficulty rating:

STAGE 5 BAYSON

The giant bomber Bayson is one of trickiest bosses in *U.N. Squadron*. While its giant stature suggests it should be a comfortable target, it proves anything but a fly in the park, as its tail gun fires an insane amount of bullets that prove difficult to evade. Meanwhile, at the same time it's doing this, it occasionally drops enemy fighters into the mix to distract your attention. A good tactic is therefore to keep your distance from Bayson so that you can give yourself as much time as possible to react to its exhausting attacks.

Difficulty rating:





STAGE 6
MISSILE LAUNCHER

A very similar boss to the carrier that closes Stage 4, this missile carrier attacks in a similar manner, launching a combination of fighters and missiles in the air, but with the added danger that this time fighters will occasionally show up on the scene and drop napalm everywhere. As before, work your way towards the core found at the end of the launcher and keep firing at it until it eventually gives up the ghost.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 7
BULLHEAD

Oddly, despite its late appearance this is actually one of the easiest bosses. Bullhead is a freight plane escorted by two large fighters. Neither guard plane is capable of taking a lot of damage, so a good trick is to keep pummelling Bullhead with gunfire and missiles until his bodyguards arrive on the scene, and then turn your attention to them. Once the two fighters are destroyed, Bullhead is pretty easy to pick off.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 8
MINKS

An odd name for a battleship – it sounds like a name you'd give a cat – but nevertheless Minks is one of the best boss fights in the game. To sink this huge and ridiculously named battleship you have to take out all of the giant gun turrets that are positioned on its deck. This is no easy job, as Minks has plenty of turrets, plenty of secondary guns, and basically enjoys throwing an awful lot at you at once, including kamikaze pilots. As with Stage 3, failure to destroy the targets in one fly pass will see your plane swing by for a second attempt. If you're skilled enough you should be able to finish the fight in two attempts.



Difficulty rating:

STAGE 9
ARSENAL

As this screenshot shows quite ably, this boss pretty much chucks a barrage of enemy and gunfire your way. This tricky target takes the form of a bunker that is protected by a giant telescopic tower made up of eight mini-laser and rocket turrets. In addition to these, enemy fighters also enter the fray. As you don't need to destroy the individual cannons to destroy the tower, our advice is to simply fly as low to the bunker as you possibly can (exactly as we've done in the shot below), and concentrate on the bottom turrets. Most of the enemy fire directed at you will simply pass overhead, with the exception of a few kamikaze planes and bullets that can easily be taken care of.

Difficulty rating:



STAGE 10
PROJECT 4 FORTRESS

In what could be a possible homage to the third stage in *R-Type*, the final mission of *U.N. Squadron* is one big boss battle against Project 4's giant air frigate. The fortress is absolutely massive in size. As such, the majority of this battle is taken up with avoiding gunfire, rockets and lasers long enough to eventually reach its only weak spot. When you've reached this point, you must blast a way to the ship's core, being careful to avoid the damaged debris that breaks free. This is incredibly tricky, as you are given little room to manoeuvre when you're inside the air vessel, and you have to dodge a constant barrage of lasers and regenerating gun turrets that protect the core. Dextrous flying and steady nerves are your only hope, though if you've managed to get this far you've already proven you have what it takes.



Difficulty rating:

SUPER MARIO KART

BROOMY, BRM, BROOOOOOM!



» **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
» **RELEASED:** 1992
» **GENRE:** KART RACER
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES

HISTORY



Do you remember Mode 7 from back in the day? Anyone who owned a SNES should, since it was one of the hotter gaming buzz-phrases along with "16 mega-baps", "parallax groping" and "defibrillated joysticks." Well, depending on where you lived that is. The above examples I'm told were popular in Swedish SNES magazines of the time.

Mode 7 wowed us with pseudo-3D japery, but in reality it was little more than a massive flat image being rotated, panned and zoomed; close up the imagery became a deranged mass of blocky pixels – we can't even bring our eyes to look upon the original *Pilotwings* anymore, for fear of sullying our memories. But hark, oh fellow pad junkies, for there are some Mode 7 games which can still captivate despite their now archaic means of display.

The racing genre was well served by Mode 7, with two excellent examples. The first was *F-Zero*, a futuristic racer which focused on driving skill and straight-line racing, which is regarded as a classic. It was minimalist in design, uncluttered and refined, but it lacked a two-player mode. Two years later Nintendo released *Super Mario Kart*, the complete (though complimentary) antithesis to *F-Zero*; it was the other side to the racing coin and balanced things out nicely.

SMK featured more intense and frenetic racing; it had short-cuts, sudden speed-depleting crashes, wild wacky weapons, and a roster of Nintendo characters. It also kick-started the hyper-cute, super-deformed, karting-racer sub-genre, bringing it right into the masses' faces and making them love it. The one-player mode was excellent and provided a great challenge, either through the standard Grand Prix or Time Trial modes. But the real draw for the game was its two-player modes: Grand Prix co-op, standard racing, or the ultimate destroyer of friendships, BATTLE MODE! How can anyone claim to have been a SNES gamer if they'd never experienced this magical rite of passage? There's nothing quite like shooting a red shell into your best friend in Battle Course 2, and then grabbing a feather to jump into the nearby barriers thereby protecting yourself from their vengeful wrath.




1
00' 00" 57
x 3
x 05
8


2
00' 00" 59
x 3
7

THE MAKING OF

Super Star Wars TRILOGY

Even now, the Super Star Wars games remain the only movie trilogy to make it onto a single console. Mike Bevan speaks to director Kalani Streicher to discover the secrets of the epic platform saga



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** JVC/NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS/ SCUPLTURED SOFTWARE
- **RELEASED:** 1992-1994
- **PLATFORM:** SUPER NINTENDO
- **GENRE:** PLATFORM/SPACE COMBAT

Cast your mind back to a time not so long ago when the Super Nintendo and Sega Mega Drive were the game console kings, and a certain Mr. Lucas had given us a mere three instalments of his interstellar movie juggernaut; the bonafide sci-fi classics *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and another one with Ewoks. Released in 1992, *Super Star Wars* was a state-of-the-art mix of platform action and 3D shoot-'em-up sections, culminating in the famous X-Wing trench run – arguably the closest interactive experience the film franchise had yet seen. It became a major ace in the sleeve for Nintendo's battle against arch-rival Sega, and a future benchmark for action games on the SNES.

"I started working at Lucasfilm Games in 1988 as a designer/ programmer," recalls Kalani Streicher, producer and lead designer of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy. "At the time they were trying to expand into the European markets and looking for someone who was fluent in German. I fitted the bill and they hired me immediately. My first project was *Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders* with lead designer David Fox. As we were finishing the game I started working on porting and localising all of the story games such as *Maniac Mansion* and *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* into various European languages on a variety of platforms."

After building up and managing LucasArts' localisation department, and a brief programming stint on Brian Moriarty's *Loom*, Kalani finally asked the question many working at the company had been itching to for years. Lucasfilm had previously shied away from entering *Star Wars* territory for its gaming releases, the nearest it had come being an abandoned attempt at a point-and-click adventure from Hal Barwood, designer of *Indiana Jones And The Fate of Atlantis*.

"Lucasfilm was very focused on the PC platforms, such as the IBM, Mac, Amiga and Atari ST," explains Kalani. "A bunch of us wanted to work on console games and a handful of them wanted to work on *Star Wars*, including myself. Basically we asked our manager, Steve Arnold, 'Why aren't we on console, and why aren't we developing *Star Wars* games for it?" He replied, 'Do you guys want to do it? Go for it!' And off we



IN THE BEGINNING

"YOU CAN'T START a *Star Wars* game without the crawler. That's inconceivable!" says Kalani of his homage to the famous opening of *A New Hope*. "I wanted the game to start exactly the same way as the movie, with the text crawler and the camera pan to the spaceship and planet. I wanted the player to truly believe they were watching a movie and immersing themselves immediately in becoming Luke Skywalker. The in-game cut-scenes were directly from the movies and/or photo archives. For me, the cut-scenes had the purpose of grounding the player to the authenticity of the movies, and then let them interact and explore the environments as they were playing the levels"



went building a *Star Wars* game for console." Kalani teamed up with Utah-based developer Sculptured Software, producing *Star Wars* for the NES, a platform action game based on the plot of the first movie which became a template for the later Super Nintendo title and its sequels, *Super Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*. The relationship with Sculptured would remain for all three Super Nintendo games.

"My vision was to create the first trilogy on a single platform for our fans," Kalani tells us. "We were slightly behind the curve getting onto the SNES, though in the end we pulled off the release of each game from the *Star Wars* trilogy back-to-back, year after year, which I'm very proud of." As an avid gamer himself, Kalani demonstrates admirable taste when revealing the titles that inspired his first Super Nintendo project. "I was a big fan of platform games and side-scrollers," he says. "*Contra*, *Super Castlevania*, *Turrican* and *Mega Man* on SNES were my favourite games. I was also playing the *Willow* arcade game, which inspired me to push the visual quality on the SNES above other games. I wanted it to be as good a side-scroller as *Contra* or *Castlevania*, with the visual quality of arcade games such as *Willow* or *Street Fighter*, and vehicle gameplay using Mode 7 as seen in *F-Zero*."



» [SNES] Nothing's gonna stop Han getting to the Millenium Falcon; not even whatever this thing is.



» [SNES] The Cantina boss is based on one of the creatures in the film's holographic chess set.

> **"We were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle-combat for the SNES"**

Mode 7, the Super Nintendo's unique and much-touted graphics mode, allows for the rapid manipulation and scaling of a background 'landscape', the first instance in *Super Star Wars* being the early landspeeder stage, as Luke travels towards a Sandcrawler encountering a bunch of really annoying Jawas. Though primitive by modern standards, the use of this technique made recreating seminal vehicular *Star Wars* moments possible in a way that wowed gamers of the time. Later series highlights would include the Hoth Snowspeeder vs. AT-AT battles of *Super Empire Strikes Back*, and the gripping dash of the Millennium Falcon through the bowels of the unfinished Death Star Mk II in *Super Return Of The Jedi*.

"I wanted to allow players to interact with their favourite *Star Wars* vehicles in third or

THE MAKING OF

first-person perspective, and experience the different aspects they'd seen in the movies," says Kalani. "You might say we were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle combat for the SNES. I didn't want to utilise the vehicles in a side-scrolling or top-down fashion. I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy."

> "I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy"

Indeed, the series succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of the films remarkably well, from the opening text crawl over Tatooine in *Super Star Wars*, to the Lucas-esque screen wipes and imposing rendition of John Williams' score. Each game closely follows the plot of the relevant film, transitioning through platform sections with memorable bosses like the Sarlacc Pit Monster, Boba Fett, and the Rancor, and interspersed with story-progressing cut-scenes. With a rich tapestry of characters, creatures and vehicles to draw on from the films, the team took pride in attempting to present as authentic a *Star Wars* console experience as possible. "I looked at every aspect of the movie in detail with the team and pointed out the environments and characters I wanted in the game," says Kalani. "We used reference materials and photos from Lucasfilm's photo library, and took reference pictures of the actual movie models from the Lucas Archives. Everybody on the team was a hardcore *Star Wars* fan. I was also producing the *X-Wing* game at the same time, which added even more extensive research of every spacecraft and ship in the game. I was heavily entrenched in getting the authenticity of the *Star Wars* universe into these games."

"Though from the beginning I wanted to retell the story of the movies in an interactive fashion," he continues, "I also knew, being the *Star Wars* geek myself, that I wanted to bring in elements that never were explained or expanded upon in the movies, especially areas or characters that were mentioned briefly in the films, such as fighting the *Star Wars* chess monster as a boss in the Cantina." Kalani is quick to praise what he describes as the "terrific relationship" between Lucasfilm and Sculptured Software over the course of the three games. "We were in control of all creative aspects of the game such as game design, art and animation, and Sculptured was responsible for coding the game," he explains. "Sculptured had a great engine, tools and development kits that allowed us to rapidly create levels and character animation. [Lead programmer] Peter Ward at Sculptured was an incredible engineer and a true *Star Wars* fan. I had such a blast working with him. Initially I created a design document outlining all specification and progression of the levels, characters and vehicles from the first to last



» [SNES] The lush backgrounds of the Dagobah sections are some of the prettiest in the series.



» [SNES] Moseying around Mos Eisley offered a whole lot of shades of beige to enjoy.



» [SNES] This ED-209-looking lumbering monstrosity guards the Death Star hanger bay.



» [SNES] Han attempts to escape the Carbonite freezing chamber. Hasn't he watched *Empire's* ending?



» [SNES] For *Star Wars* nerds, Boba Fett's Slave 1 is pretty much the coolest boss in the game.

level. We then did storyboards for the plot progression, cinematics and story panels. My concept and art lead Harrison Fong storyboarded a lot of them, which we then passed on to the team and converted it into digital artwork."

In the original *Super Star Wars*, one of the early stand-out platform stages involves Luke making his way to the top of a massive Sandcrawler brimming with hostile turrets and yet more pesky Jawas. "We did several iterations on the Sandcrawler and wanted to make the player feel like they were climbing up a huge vehicle and that the level was moving as you are jumping from platform to platform, "says Kalani. Later stages give players an opportunity to control alternate heroes, such as Chewbacca in the Cantina stage, or Han Solo taking on hordes of slightly inept stormtroopers en route to the Falcon in Mos Eisley. A ride in Han's iconic galactic rustbucket, a daring rescue, and a brush with a trash compacter later the famous Death Star run awaits you. "We knew from the start that we had to have this level, and this was the climax of the game," says Kalani of the famous X-Wing sequence. "It had to live up to the then-in-the-arcades *Star Wars* game trench run. The SNES and its Mode 7 feature were perfect for this and allowed us to give the player an incredible climactic moment."

Working with Mode 7 graphics proved very much a mixture of trial and error on *Super Star Wars*. "It was our first attempt to utilise Mode 7 in a different way than other games," Kalani explains. "The landspeeder stage had to show progression, moving across a desert towards the mountains in the distance. It was a fine balance of sprite usage for the terrain, enemy characters and distant parallaxing of the mountain range. We had to take that one step further with the X-Wing level, flying across the surface and then down the trench allowing the player to be able to move anywhere in space. And lastly integrating the Millenium Falcon took several iterations. It is such a unique ship that we fairly quickly ran out of sprites/tiles. We had to pull off every trick we had in the book for those sections." One interesting side note Kalani offers is that the atmospheric platform section set inside the Death Star nearly didn't make it into the finished game. "That level was difficult to pull off and barely avoided the chopping block," he remembers. "I remember contemplating many times cutting it, but I am glad that we found a way to make it work and keep it in the game."

For the sequels, Lucasflim and Sculptured continued to refine their game engine, packing in ever more content and visual advancements with the help of increased cartridge capacities. The series finale, *Super Return of the Jedi*, was the largest; with its 16-Megabit cart it was twice the size of the original *Super Star Wars*. The desire to innovate and improve was not without its share of technical stumbling blocks. "We were constantly pushing the SNES and adding as much content as possible from the *Star Wars* universe from one game to another, challenging and trying to outdo ourselves each time. In *Super Empire* the most challenging parts were of course the AT-AT /snowspeeder levels and the Millennium Falcon. These are iconic vehicles that needed to behave and feel like they did in the movie.

"For the AT-AT sequence, using Mode 7 for such a big vehicle was difficult. We were definitely pushing the capabilities of the SNES hardware. The cable release and circling of the snowspeeder was incredibly hard. We spent many long hours refining the gameplay to make it work. And in *Super Jedi* the speeder bike scene and final flight through the inside of the Death Star wasn't easy. For the speeder bike



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
YEAR: 1987

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEM: VARIOUS CONSOLES AND COMPUTERS
YEAR: 1990

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
SYSTEM: PC DOS, MAC, AMIGA
YEAR: 1992

X-WING
SYSTEM: PC DOS, MAC
YEAR: 1993

HEART-STOPPING MOMENTS

SUPER STAR WARS



R2-D2 has been captured by Jawas, and Luke must battle to the top of an enormous Sandcrawler, then through its dingy, hazardous innards to rescue him.



From farm boy to starship pilot, young Skywalker's final challenge is the terrifying Death Star trench, and a face-off with Vader's TIE Advanced.

SUPER EMPIRE STRIKES BACK



As the Empire attacks the Rebel base on Hoth, Luke grabs a snowspeeder and attempts to take down an incoming battalion of giant AT-AT walkers.



The climactic showdown high on the gantries of Bespin sees Luke having to draw upon all his newly-acquired Jedi skills in order to defeat his old man.

SUPER RETURN OF THE JEDI



Mean, bad-tempered and certainly no oil-painting, the Rancor will leave you wondering if breaking into Jabba's palace was such a good idea after all.



In the Millennium Falcon, Lando Calrissian redeems himself with a daring raid on the unfinished Death Star II in the memorable finale of the saga.

THE MAKING OF

chase the most difficult part was creating believable trees moving past at high speeds. Because of the difficulty I considered many other design perspectives such as isometric or top-down views, but they never felt as dramatic as the Mode 7 version."

One gameplay aspect that was greatly improved for both sequels was the addition of RPG-style character development, with Luke gradually gaining a number of useful Force Powers including the ability to heal, levitate, deflect attacks or even mind control enemies. The downside is that powers can be only be collected from certain locations in each game, meaning they can be easily missed by the not-so prudent Jedi. "Balancing the Force Powers wasn't easy," admits Kalani. "We had to anticipate players getting through a level with or without them. For me it was an integral part of character evolution and player progression (levelling up of a character) in adding Force Powers in *Super Empire* and *Super Jedi*."

For *Super Empire Strikes* back, the initial platform stages on Hoth added an extra dimension of difficulty due to the slippy-slidey nature of the planet's icy terrain. "This was our first attempt to add a 'slippery' factor to gameplay," Kalani comments. "It was difficult to test because of the many ways to slide into objects and assure proper collision. We also had to work hard on making the tiling of ice pieces look organic and not too repetitive. I enjoyed all the levels and am glad we added Han Solo and Chewie throughout these levels." However, these stages, along with some of the more sprawling, hazard-filled levels and increasingly fearsome bosses of both sequels, still attract criticism over their degree of difficulty, despite the addition of level passcodes.

"I get that a lot," chuckles Kalani. "These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then! I definitely could not deliver such difficult games today. In hindsight, I would reduce the enemy damage by 10-20 per cent, make the player character able to absorb more damage, add more power-ups and improve level design. Though I wouldn't want to make it too easy – it has to be challenging. The player needs to feel like they are earning the Force. My excuse for the difficulty of those games in Yoda's words is: 'You are not a Jedi yet. Much training you will need!'"

Overall, Kalani tells us that there really isn't that much he would change about his SNES gaming trilogy in hindsight. "I'm very happy how the games turned out," he admits. "We did an incredible job getting this trilogy out back-to-back each Christmas. There are a couple of elements I wish we could have incorporated if we would have had more time, such as all the levels, characters and bosses we had to cut from the game – with each game we built more levels than we actually shipped. I'd also make the games a bit easier to play. I'm very fond of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy and very pleased with its popularity. They were my very first games and we had such fun designing and developing them."



» [SNES] A mysterious masked bounty hunter causes havoc in the halls of Jabba's Palace…

> "These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then!"

RG thought it might be fun to ask Kalani if, like us, he had any favourites out of the many memorable *Star Wars* moments found across the trilogy. "There are so many favourite moments," he replies. "A lot of them had to do with gameplay as well as the technical challenges they presented. In *Super Star Wars* my favourites are the landspeeder and trench run levels. In *Super Empire* it's definitely the snowspeeder/AT-AT level. Who doesn't

WHAT THE PRESS SAID

"THERE'S A MINI *Star Wars* revival on right now, bringing with it lots of good things – books, a fab comic, one brilliant PC game (*X-Wing*) and this, not only the best film game on the SNES, but a real contender for best of its type on any system."
SUPER STAR WARS IMPORT REVIEW, SUPER PLAY, FEBRUARY 1993

"TAKING ONLY MINOR liberties with the plot of the film, *Super Star Wars* is a milestone in movie tie-ins which shows just how this type of game should be done. The best soundtracks and spot effects ever heard on the SNES combine with graphics and stunning cut sequences to recreate a real feeling of playing the movie."
NINTENDO MAGAZINE SYSTEM, FEBRUARY 1993







» [SNES] *Super Empire Strikes Back* puts you behind the controls of the iconic Millennium Falcon for the first time.







» [SNES] You too can control a hyperactive four-foot teddy bear.

want to take down and AT-AT? That was incredibly difficult, but we managed to pull it off. One of my favourite levels is also the Carbonite Freezing Chamber playing as Chewbacca. You had to keep moving and were fighting jet troopers, stormtroopers with shields and bombs, various bounty hunters and the little pesky Ugnaughts. The Darth Vader levels were also a treat. It's so emotional going up against Vader no matter how pixelated he looked. By this time the player had all of the different Forces accessible and Luke was at his most powerful. Jon Knowles, my animation supervisor, did an awesome job animating Darth with the limited sprites we had available."

"In *Super Jedi* it's definitely the Rancor. It's the biggest beast in the *Star Wars* universe, and so satisfying when you take it down. The sail-barge level was also exciting. For the first time we could create and show what the sail-barge looked like on the outside and inside. In addition, we were able to go up against a slew of bounty hunters and strange creatures. And you got to play Princess Leia with her chain weapon in a bikini! Then of course there are the final levels flying the Falcon inside the Death Star. The climax of the entire trilogy racing to the core and back out in the nick of time blasting the Death Star into a million pieces. Finally, the showdown with the Emperor was a fun level to design. The difficulty was in creating the scene with the round window. It took a lot of tiles to look right. And then giving the Emperor all of his lightning effect powers…"

Before his departure from LucasArts earlier this year, *Force Unleashed* producer Haden Blackman stated that he would have loved to see a modern revival of the *Super Star Wars* series. We wonder if Kalani would be game.

"Definitely, I'd be all over that project," Kalani enthuses. "It's the game that catapulted LucasArts into the console space and it can do it again on the new platforms. I've been trying to convince LucasArts to recreate the *Super Star Wars* trilogy for tablets, handhelds or Xbox Live Arcade/PSN. If given that opportunity I'd keep the essence of the original, though reinvent and innovate the game with today's gameplay mechanics, give it a visual facelift and, of course, pack it with even more *Star Wars* goodies including additional environments, characters, bosses and vehicles from the movie. I'd also add a mode where players can create additional content to the game, like *LittleBigPlanet*. Maybe readers could start petitioning LucasArts for a new *Super Star Wars* series on the new platforms. I'm totally up for it, and it will be even better than the original…"

SETTLE A SCORE

THE SUPERB RENDITION of the *Star Wars* theme music featured on the title screen of all three games in the trilogy was a feature that surprised Kalani as much as the rest of us. "We had an incredible audio technician on the team," he says. "I remember when I heard the *Star Wars* theme in the game for the first time. I literally said, 'Oh myGod, how did he do this and fit it on the SNES cartridge? It sounds identical to the movie!' It was incredible to hear it in the game and I was literally blown away. Hats off to Paul Webb at Sculptured for his dedication and passion in creating the best movie music score on the SNES. I still get comments today that the Super Nintendo score is the best on any console!"

TOP 25 SNES GAMES

Retro Gamer readers reveal their favourite ever SNES games. Find out if yours made the final cut









SimCity

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR: 1991 **GENRE:** STRATEGY

25 **It may be** primarily remembered as a PC franchise but, with numerous changes and additions to this console port, it's little wonder so many of you cited it as a SNES favourite. Developed by Nintendo EAD rather than Maxis, this version has a distinct Japanese flavour and several beautiful Nintendo twists – seeing Bowser stomp through the city is up there with the greatest gaming moments. The team did a great job of making it work with a controller rather than a mouse, too.

ActRaiser

DEVELOPER: QUINTET
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** STRATEGY/ACTION

24 **The beauty of** *ActRaiser* is that it is effectively two games in one. Half god game – albeit without any direct religious references, thanks to Nintendo's hard-line self-censorship of the time – half action game, all awesome. While it's true that neither part is a dedicated example of the genres in question, it's the unique fusion that makes this so memorable. Putting town creation and management on hold to go kick some ass is something that no other game can offer.





Cybernator

DEVELOPER: NCS CORP
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

23 **A surprisingly strong** showing in support of this shooter sees it make the list ahead of bona fide classics like *Super Punch-Out!*, but you've gotta love the underdog. It's an inventive mech shooter that really makes you feel like you're in control of a huge, complex piece of kit and it still holds up brilliantly today. The same can't be said of the budget PlayStation 2 remake, sadly – our advice would be to just stick with the original…



Zombies Ate My Neighbours

DEVELOPER: LUCASARTS
YEAR: 1993 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

22 **There's a lot** to be said for this B-movie shooter, so we're not overly surprised to see you come out in numbers to support it. The recent sad loss of LucasArts might have done something to bolster its following, but it's certainly not ill-deserved – the humour, style and tight gameplay are such that many modern developers would kill to put their name to something as polished and refined as this.

Perhaps the original great co-op game, *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* lets protagonists Zeke and Julie use anything they can find to hold off the zombie apocalypse and secure the safety of the guys and gals that live down the street. But it's not just zombies – variety here is exceptional and, over the course of the game, you'll find yourself gunning down pretty much every B-movie cliché – from giant ants to vampires and aliens. But it doesn't stop there, as the level with the gigantic rampaging baby perfectly displays. It keeps you guessing by constantly changing things up – even though gameplay changes little, that each stage can feel entirely unique is amazing.

Said variety extends beyond simply switching enemy sprites out for new ones, too. It's the weapons, an improvised arsenal comprising of everything from water pistols to rocket launchers. It's the settings, myriad slices of suburbia pulled straight out of every low-budget horror movie ever made. And it's the characters – even the titular neighbours come in all shapes and forms, with each of them worth a different amount of points if you can save them in time. Thankfully, you don't need to rescue them all but, the more you manage to free, the better your score will be. And just like most games in this genre, that's all that really matters.





Super Aleste

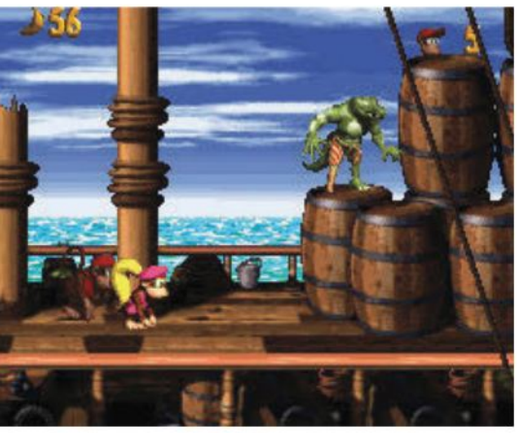
DEVELOPER: COMPILE
YEAR: 1992 **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

20 **An excellent shooter,** as evidenced by the fact that it managed to beat the likes of *Super R-Type*, *Gradius III* and *UN Squadron*. A rich and varied arsenal is what really makes *Super Aleste* stand out, each of the eight weapons offering six different levels of power. Furthermore, each can be modified at the touch of a button, adding reverse fire (or similar area coverage) or changing properties to give options that can more or less cover every situation the game throws at you. Like pretty much every shooter, there's a problem in that death causes you to respawn with virtually no firepower – but there's a simple solution to that problem: just be better at the game. Solved.

EarthBound

DEVELOPER: APE/HAL LABORATORY
YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** RPG

19 **It may not** have had a UK release, but that seems to have had little impact on the popularity of this glorious RPG. Perhaps offered a little more exposure thanks to Ness's appearance in *Super Smash Bros*, this quirky little title can take pride of place in any collection – mint originals now change hands for upwards of 500 quid. Why? It's one of the few retro classics not to have seen a re-release in any form, despite constant calls for it to come to Virtual Console. Still, all that is set to change now, as the cult RPG has finally been released on Nitendo's digital service. Let's see if that does anything to the insane price that original copies currently go for…



Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

DEVELOPER: RARE
YEAR: 1995 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

21 **If you could** all have just pulled together and decided amongst yourselves which *Donkey Kong Country* game was best, it could quite easily have made the top five. Instead, divided opinion gives us two *Kong* games in this list, Rare's platform sequel just missing out on the top 20. Quite how DK came to be kidnapped in the first place is a conversation for another time, though it's clear that Diddy and Dixie can handle themselves well enough without him. It was around this point that Rare's love affair with collectibles began, so those that have enjoyed cleaning up and finding everything in the likes of *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Star Fox Adventures* would do well to recognise where it all started.





Super Mario All-Stars

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

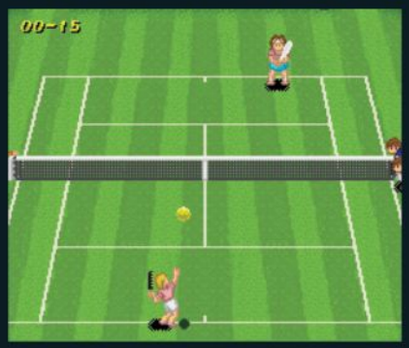
18 **A compilation and** console bundle title it may be, but far be it from that to exclude this collection of timeless games from your list. Sporting enhanced versions of the three NES *Mario* titles as well as super-tough variant *The Lost Levels* – famously *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan, while we received a massively modified version of *Doki Doki Panic* – this is pretty much platforming heaven. Any one of the collected games would be worthy of a spot on this list alone, so the combination of all four is pretty much a shoo-in. You could buy a console and get by for months just on the single bundled game, which is not something that can be said of any console since. Later versions also included *Super Mario World*, which you can safely expect to read more about in the coming pages. Just a guess.



Super Tennis

DEVELOPER: TOKYO SHOSEKI
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** SPORTS

17 **Early titles are** always going to live large in the hearts of fans – they're the ones that get the most play while you're waiting for the next big game, after all. We can all but assume that's why this 1991 title earned a spot on this list, although we'd struggle to point to an earlier multiplayer sports game that we got so much enjoyment out of. Making tennis quick and fun was a masterstroke, though even the points that dragged on proved to be hugely enjoyable – that's why we saw the same arcade template applied to *Smash Court Tennis* and, later, *Virtua Tennis*. We're all for simulation but, when it comes to a quick sporting thrill, we'd struggle to name many better games than this beauty. It sure as hell beats leaping around the lounge with a remote in your hand, that's for sure.





Super Bomberman

DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** ACTION

16 **Again, *Bomberman* would** be higher on this list if it weren't for the fact that gamers had no less than five different kinds of *Super* to consider in this case. Ignoring the fact that the console had just two controller ports, Konami elected to use an adorable multi-tap to allow for showdowns on a scale never before seen on console. Later games introduced more elements tailored to accommodate multiplayer massacres and, to be frank, we'd probably rather have seen one of these make the list than the simple original. However, there's a lot to be said for getting there first, and for all of you who voted for any of the superb sequels you can at least find solace in the fact that the little bobble-headed murderer managed to get onto the list at all. And we're glad he did – there are few better tests of pure gaming skill than a *Bomberman* face-off. Quite how this franchise wound up entertaining kart racers and sports games we'll never know – it remains one of the best and purest multiplayer experiences in the entirety of gaming.

Donkey Kong Country

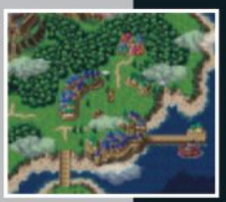
DEVELOPER: RARE
YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER



15 **Poor old Retro.** As much as it tried its best to recapture the magic of the originals, in essence it's just not the same – the music, the design and the well judged level of difficulty were all nailed the first time around. A stunning effort by Rare.

Chrono Trigger

DEVELOPER: SQUARE
YEAR: 1995 **GENRE:** RPG



14 **As if this** time-hopping RPG classic wasn't going to make this list. *As if.* Any game that stars a noble frog warrior is one that we fully support, so we'll take any excuse we can get to celebrate this wonderful action-RPG from Square's archives.

Star Fox

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD/ARGONAUT SOFTWARE **YEAR:** 1993
GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP



13 **This is more** than deserving of recognition for its introduction of useless gaming baggage Slippy Toad alone. It's just a shame that its pioneering 3D visuals will forever take a back seat due to the 'do a barrel roll' meme it spawned.

Final Fantasy VI

DEVELOPER: SQUARE
YEAR: 1994 **GENRE:** RPG



12 **Picking just one** of Square's 16-bit *Final Fantasy* games is a near-impossible choice, so well done for settling on this one. Echoes of *FFVI* can be felt in every canon game since, and its Uematsu soundtrack is enough to secure it a place on this rundown alone.

F-Zero

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR: 1990 **GENRE:** RACING



11 **Racing games are** boring? Yeah, nice try. A futuristic setting and amazing 3D visuals made this an unforgettable experience for everyone who played it, though it's saddening that we haven't seen a new version since the exceptional *GX* on GameCube.



Super Castlevania IV

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

10 **Ask most people** which is their favourite *Castlevania* and, more often than not, you'll hear *Symphony Of The Night*. While the PlayStation game is a spectacular display of genre-straddling RPG action, there's a hardcore arcade purity to *Super Castlevania IV* that gives it the edge. The music, the bosses, the sheer variety… this is the stuff of legend and its reverence is far from ill-deserved. Action-platforming with a gothic slant, you could walk for miles and not find anyone who has gotten past the second level – *Dark Souls* and its ilk may claim to have created the hardcore sector, but we know better. *Castlevania* was there first. And if you can claim to have finished this, that's something that counts for a lot on your gaming CV – arcade coin-munchers have nothing on this beast.



Secret Of Mana

DEVELOPER: SQUARE
YEAR RELEASED: 1993 **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG

9 **There had to** be at least one Square RPG in the top ten and, with so many failing to get European releases, it stands to reason that this should be the one to make the cut. Three-player co-op was a unique selling point but, even without that, *Secret Of Mana* would still hold up brilliantly. This action-RPG managed to tick every box, from a unique leveling system to a great cast of characters that could be tailored to your own whim. Despite several sequels, this remains the best game in the series – the PlayStation sequel has its fans, but their numbers are feeble compared to those who would back the original. To this day, we've yet to see a truly great *Mana* follow-up and, while it's unlikely that we'll see one in this play-safe environment, it'd be a retro insta-win if Square announced a new *Mana* game tomorrow.



Pilotwings

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1990 **GENRE:** FLIGHT SIMULATION

8 **Tech demos seem** to be the order of the day lately, with the likes of Wii Sports and Kinect Adventures capturing the imaginations of millions. But this beat all of them to the punch, a showcase for the unknown power of the SNES and an early glimpse at the magic of 3D. Few could have imagined that a flight game would be the one to show off what the SNES was truly capable of, but that's precisely what *Pilotwings* did. Three-dimensional gaming wouldn't become the norm until years later, but we can't forget who planted that seed – few did it better either, to be fair. In terms of offering a unique experience, few titles can rub shoulders with *Pilotwings*. Even the N64 and 3DS updates never really managed to recapture the magic of the original, fun as they may be.

Contra III: The Alien Wars

DEVELOPER: KONAMI
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

7 **Anyone that throws** their hardcore weight around based on recent accomplishments like finishing *Dark Souls* or *Super Meat Boy* would do well to pop back in time and give this monster a go. Whatever you choose to call it, this is pretty much the epitome of hardcore – dudes be coming from everywhere, and all of them will kill you in a single hit. *Contra* had lost its way recently until *Hard Corps* brought it back – it's rare that a sequel nails exactly what was so good about the original but that's what Arc managed to do. The original still presents an awesome challenge and one that anyone can be proud to have conquered. Pretty much the ultimate run-and-gun game, *Contra III* exists to kick the ass of anyone who tries to play it. As you probably know. If not, give it a shot today and don't even vaguely expect to win.



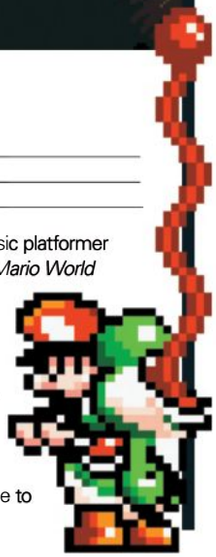




Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1995 **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

6 **We have to** be honest – we thought this classic platformer would come in a little higher. But with *Super Mario World* stealing the majority of the vote, we guess it was a 'one or the other' mindset in most cases. Either way, this dino-themed sequel performed admirably and, while we wouldn't want to have to make a pitch as to which was the better game, the egg-tossing love this game has received pretty much does that for us. Platform games don't come much better than this, especially when they don't involve the bugs or bandicoots that have come to define the genre.



Super Metroid

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO R&D1/INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
YEAR RELEASED: 1994 **GENRE:** ACTION/ ADVENTURE



5 **Few games have** laid out their stalls quite so well as this. *Super Metroid* basically doesn't say a word, but it doesn't need to. If anything, that's the joy of it – the mystery is what keeps you playing and, even when you know what you're doing, this is not an easy world to explore. Setting the template for an entire sub-genre, this can happily claim to be one of the most influential games ever made. The recent Virtual Console Wii U re-release has given us such greats as 'Y can't Metroid crawl', cementing it as one of the great work-it-out-as-you-go-along games out there…

Super Mario Kart

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** RACER



4 **Another obvious choice,** although it'd take a real Blue Shell enthusiast (there's no such thing) to claim that *Mario Kart* was a fair way to settle disputes. Still, few would argue that this wasn't one of the great multiplayer games of our time, especially in the age before the game-breaking Blue Shell came into play. Multiplayer rivalries can still be settled with this tried and tested method, although many cite more recent games – *Double Dash*, *MK7* and even the Wii version – as the best. There's no right answer... well, okay, there is. And it's not *Mario Kart 64*.

Street Fighter II Turbo

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
YEAR RELEASED: 1992 **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

3 **If you owned** a SNES and had a second controller, chances are you doubled up for the opportunity to show your mates what a Dragon Punch or a Flash Kick was. *Street Fighter* was *the* go-to competitive game at the time and, while we've since learned to play on stick, that wasn't really an option back then. Capcom did an incredible job of bringing the arcade experience home – there are few better coin-op conversions than this one and it was this kind of perfect port that made your friends with a Mega Drive incredibly jealous.



The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD
YEAR RELEASED: 1991 **GENRE:** ACTION-RPG



2 **Arguments will rage** until the end of time as to which of Link's adventures is the best (ironically, it's *definitely* not *Link's Adventure*) but it's this seminal title and *Ocarina Of Time* that most often find themselves tussling for the top spot. While the 3D debut was unquestionably a masterpiece, it likely wouldn't have existed at all had it not been for this beautiful and surprisingly open RPG – it might have offered slightly more direction than the NES original but it still managed to feel like you were lost in a strange world with only your wits (well, those and whatever tools you could loot from dungeons) to rely on. The reveal of the Dark World ranks up there with the best gaming surprises of all time. Eat your heart out, Kojima…



Super Mario World



■ **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO EAD ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

Nintendo's mascot was always going to be a clear favourite to claim the top spot on this list, but the landslide took even those of us expecting a moustachioed number one by surprise. Mario didn't just walk this list – he grabbed a Cape Feather and flew over the top of the whole damn thing.

With *Super Mario World* appearing as a pack-in with many console bundles, this would have been the first experience of 16-bit gaming for many people. And what a way to start – it'd be like your first taste of meat being a huge T-bone steak, or your first car after passing your test being a Ferrari. This is seen by many as being as close as we've come to platforming perfection and, truth be told, we're in no position to argue. We still play *Super Mario World* regularly to this day and we're *still* discovering new tricks and secrets hidden away in the many, many stages.

There's so much to talk about in celebration of *Super Mario World* that it's difficult to know where to begin. But, we'll start as is logical – with pretty much the first thing you see when starting up the game. The map structure isn't entirely new, with *Super Mario Bros 3* pulling much the same stunt albeit broken down by level. But, it's the improved sense of scale that comes from having one big map that really makes this feel like an epic journey, and one where the route – and even the destination – aren't always clear. Find a hidden exit to a stage and you can find yourself branching out into areas far more difficult than you're used to. But, with so many routes on offer, there's no shame in returning to the beaten path in order to hurry along your journey to Bowser's castle.

Then, there's the way that each of the power-ups changes how you approach and traverse each stage. A cape will let you soar up to hidden cloud platforms if you can get the speed up to get lift in the first place, while a fire flower lets you muscle your way past many obstacles. There are even a few situational pickups (such as the one that turns Mario into a balloon) to use and abuse, though it's definitely the trusty mushroom that will see the most use. You can even keep one of these back in reserve – useful if you know you'll need it later in a tricky level and don't want to risk losing it along the way.

Whether or not there's such a thing as a perfect game is an argument that will never be won. Whether or not *Super Mario World* is the closest thing we've seen to one, though? That's not even up for debate.

What Makes It So Super

Hidden Exits

If you've got the right power-up and an explorer's spirit, there are loads of secret ways to end levels prematurely. Doing so can open up new paths that let you speed across the world map, as Star Road fans will know

Dino Might

Yoshi eggs are hidden away in many of the blocks scattered around *Mario World*, and unleashing the beast is always a joy. Not only does he offer you an extra hit, there are also certain areas that you simply can't reach without him

Perfect Design

Variety counts for a lot, though it's the fact that there's no weak link that proves the most amazing. Whether swimming, soaring, riding or climbing, *Super Mario World* never so much as misses a beat



Star Power

Soaring above the world is Star Road, a set of super-tough stages with secret exits on every one. If you know where to find the lot, you can finish the entire game in less than ten minutes

Endless Replayability

So many exits, so many routes, so many tiny little secrets to find... there's just so much to this game that, as we said, we're still finding new power-ups and hidden areas to this day. As close to the perfect platformer as you can get, basically

The Collector's Guide



SUPER

The SNES is a great console to collect for. Follow this guide and you won't go far wrong





» **Manufacturer:** Nintendo » **Models:** Super Nintendo/Super Famicom » **Launched:** 1990 » **Country of Origin:** Japan

NINTENDO

The Collector's Guide



» It wasn't just the games that came in flimsy cardboard boxes, making anything in-tact more valuable.

WHY IT'S COLLECTABLE

Growing up in the Nineties wasn't easy. From an early age, many gamers found themselves thrown into the epicentre of a digital war between two Japanese forces to be reckoned with.

Sega and Nintendo's conflict controlled the playgrounds and workplace, *Sonic* against *Mario*. The battle continues today, as the mention of the Super Nintendo versus the Sega Mega Drive has collectors raising their control pads with pride.

Despite hosting fewer games than Sega's 16-bit offering, the SNES hosts a wealth of blockbuster hits amongst its huge library of over 500 known European releases. With the likes of *Super Mario World*, *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings* available from day one, shortly followed by *Super Mario Kart*, *Mega Man X* and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, it is no wonder that it has continued to captivate gamers to present day. However, it wasn't just about the high quality software available. Given that the gaming world had just experienced a very hard-edged and ugly selection of consoles (such as the NES and Master System), the arrival of an alluring curved console bundled with a comfortable control pad was too good to dismiss.

Where collecting is concerned, a large majority of the SNES catalogue has seen a considerable rise in value over the last few years from an influx of nostalgia-hungry gamers. But, surely these financial skirmishes taking place on auction sites are just as prominent for the Super Nintendo's 16-bit rival? Luckily, the Sega Mega Drive fans are much safer from this barrage of collectors due to one conclusive reason. Up until the Nintendo Gamecube, every game branded with the Official Nintendo Seal was released within a flimsy cardboard box. With so few mint condition boxed games available (in comparison to the near indestructible hard-cased Mega Drive games), they are highly sought after, as collectors challenge each other to replicate that brand new feeling again.

As time passed by and Mario's newest home began to build up an incredible momentum within Europe, a sporadic release schedule shortly followed and reared its ugly head. A large chunk of the rarest PAL releases originated from a single country, leaving frustrated gamers and collectors today trawling countless top-level domain variations of eBay. Of these rarities, *X Zone* (Scandinavia), *Whirlo* (Spain), *Cool World* (Spain), *Sonic Blast Man* (Spain) *Space Invaders* (Australia) and *Super Chase HQ* (Australia) tend to be the most sought after by 16-bit collectors around the world.

Although Nintendo had a wide range of multinational gamers, their hard work and dedication continued to ensure each Super Nintendo owner within Europe was catered for. Many releases were adjusted to better suit their target audiences – changes which often included alternate artwork, varying language options and occasionally 'classic' re-releases. Although this level of consideration sounds fantastic, those aiming to collect SNES variants face countless headaches due to the sheer volume of releases out there. *Super Mario World* is an extreme example of this, given its seventeen variants.



» The U.S. Super Nintendo pad dispensed with the bright colours of its PAL and Japanese counterparts.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ No matter how fondly you remember the aesthetic curves of the Super Nintendo console, a more minuscule and desirable iteration left the production line at Nintendo HQ. Dubbed the SNES Mini or SNES Jr, the redesigned console was released in both America and Japan for the low cost of $99.99 bundled with a pack-in game. While the baby-sized console never made its way to Europe, it remains a frequent purchase by those who missed out, but with a pinch of hesitation. In the most unusual case imaginable, the SNES Jr has been a victim of near perfect fakes arising on eBay over the years.



» There is quite a difference between Western and Japanese box art. Which you prefer is a matter of taste.





» Special edition cases were rare. If only they all came in metal tins, there would be a lot more complete packages today.

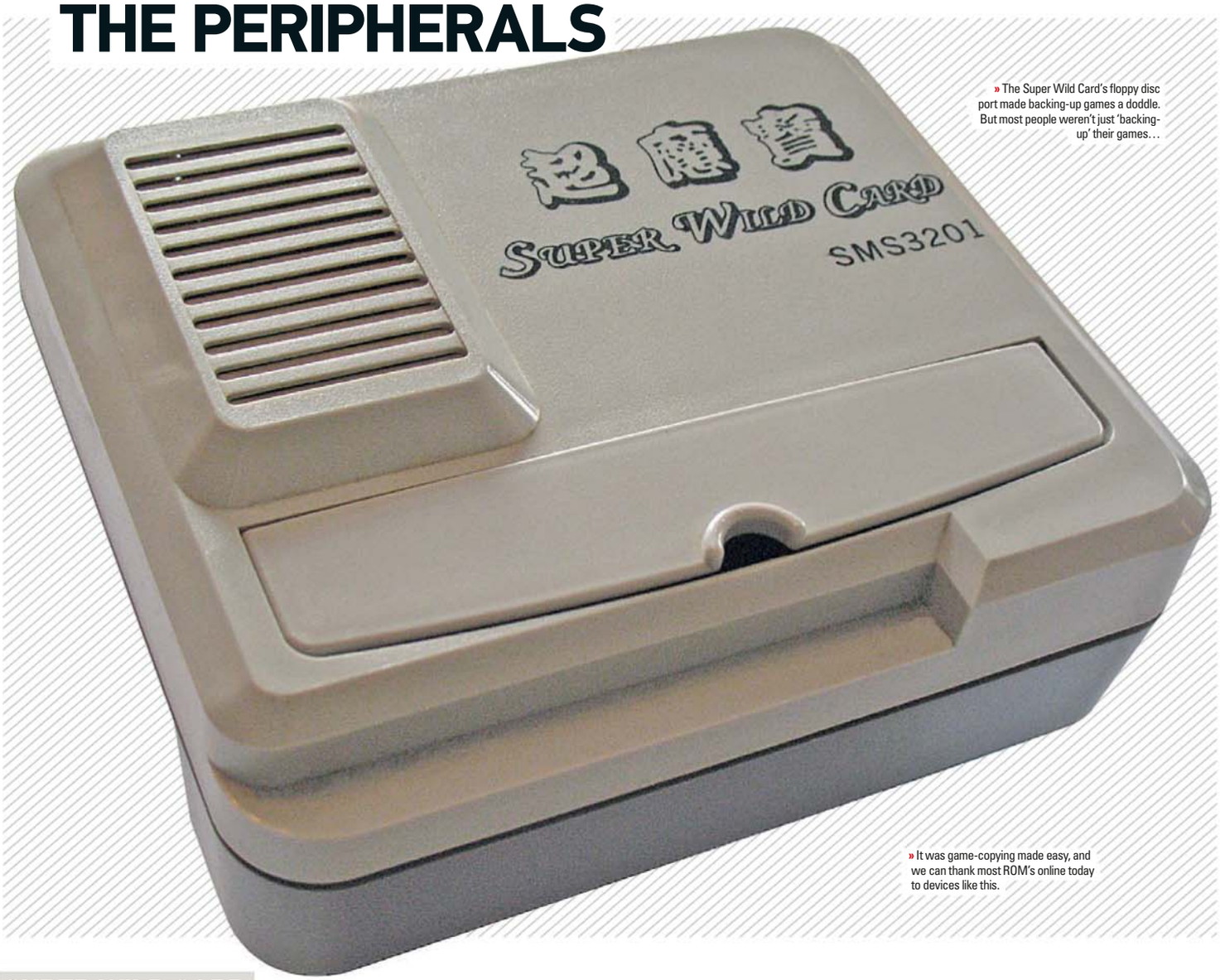
Complications aside, the Japanese and American release lists offered a much larger library of games, yet there was still a selection of prominent European releases which have gamers from across the pond intrigued. The most notable is the timeless Japanese RPG *Terranigma*, which for some untold reason saw a European localisation, yet nothing for gamers stateside. Auction snipers worldwide sit in wait for each and every time it surfaces, sadly driving the price up. *Whirlo*, *The Firemen* and *Super Bomberman 3* are other good examples of this, as European gamers often struggle to hold onto their hidden treasures.

One of the more interesting aspects to note during the 16-bit era, was how easy import games were to acquire. While the price tags within magazine adverts suggested that early arrivals of Japanese and American software were probably worth being patient for, there was one publication which almost justified these financial kidnappings. Simply known as *Super Play*, it is often referred to as the greatest gaming magazine of all time, due to its perfect combination of covering games and Japanese culture. As it focused mainly on imported titles months before their European release, a new wave of gamers were born unhappy with what their home country could offer. These disgruntled fans were often found excusing themselves as they happily paid premium prices to get their latest gaming hit way ahead of schedule. Whilst these purchases could often be expensive gambles, many of these investments have paid off, as gamers obtained classics such as *Earthbound*, *Final Fantasy III* (*VI*) and *Chrono Trigger* which never arrived in Europe. However, what they were unable to see at the time is how many of these exclusive imports would eventually fetch three figure sums, as they do today.

With such an enticement from abroad, often limited by how far our distressed wallets could be stretched, Super Nintendo fans were left questioning how they could enjoy the wealth of cartridges without skipping meals. Quite naturally, the black market was well aware of this fact and began to envision various ways to profiteer from the 16-bit juggernaut. While very few bootlegs found their way underneath the counter of less honest shops, the pirates had another device at the ready to potentially make the expensive cartridge medium a thing of the past. Given that a large majority of early cartridges could fit onto a single floppy disk, a disk drive was placed inside a Super Nintendo compatible device known as the Super Wild Card. Capable of backing up and loading cartridges from disk, this revolutionary and attractive piece of kit made stealing games all too easy. While there are more modern alternatives to this hardware, the Super Wild Card range and various other similar devices still get snapped up rather quickly due to their elusive nature.

Offering countless games spanning multiple regions and an array of diverse accessories, the Super Nintendo is by far one of the most desirable consoles to collect. Although the deep end of collecting is quickly requiring a well padded wallet to bask in, both gamers and collectors can take pleasure in the knowledge that the majority of the Super Nintendo's classic titles can still be had at a reasonable price.

THE PERIPHERALS



» The Super Wild Card's floppy disc port made backing-up games a doddle. But most people weren't just 'backing-up' their games…

» It was game-copying made easy, and we can thank most ROM's online today to devices like this.

SUPER WILD CARD

With cartridges breaking the upper limits of £59.99 in the Nineties, SNES owners often found themselves limited to how many games they can afford. While this did make game rental services a profitable business, the more savvy gamers amongst us looked for other solutions.

Piracy and cartridge copiers were no stranger to the games industry. Nintendo had already embraced the illegitimate series of 'Game Doctors' for the Famicom, which ironically used the Famicom Disk System's proprietary medium of unique disks to create counterfeit software. The SNES equivalent, however, used a more accessible method, which effectively made those expensive cartridges a non-issue.

The Super Wild Card released by Front Far East was amongst the many different flavours of backup devices which began to surface. Within each unit lay a floppy disk drive capable of reading and writing to a range of 3½-inch disk formats. Once powered up, a simplistic menu appeared on screen with the option to either back-up or load a game from the disk currently inserted. Titles exceeding the capacity of a single disk, such as the massive 48 Mbit *Tales Of Phantasia*, were broken down into multiple files often spanning a range of disks. Once the entire contents of these backups had been loaded into memory, the chosen backup would load instantly, replicating the true cartridge experience flawlessly.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, the entire process of backing up a Super Nintendo cartridge onto a disk was all too easy. Given that all you needed to duplicate a game was a minimum of one disk and the cartridge to copy from, swashbuckling gamers made the most of Blockbuster's game rental service by spending evenings 'renting' the selection of new releases. To make matters worse for the Nintendo, the disks written by the Super Wild Card were readable by any home computer with a disk drive installed. On each disk was a single ROM file (or single file broken up over multiple disks), which could be quickly copied onto another blank disk for the next well-equipped pirate gamer.

With newer games starting to exceed the capacity of a single disk, loading often became cumbersome. On the rear side of the Super Wild Card was a solution – a parallel port. With the right software available, gamers could send ROM files via a PC through a parallel port cable, in which the cartridge copier would begin to write to memory and execute the game upon completion. This quicker method was then bettered once more with the arrival of the newer and more expensive Super Wild Card DX2, a unit which allowed its disk drive to be swapped for a CD-ROM drive.

No matter which way you looked at it, the countless features made the Super Wild Card a rather inviting, although dishonest device. That said, these devices deserve our thanks as they are the main reason why the entire Super Nintendo library has been archived for future generations to come, in what we more commonly know as ROMs.

...AND THE REST



01. Super Scope

■ In an attempt to out-do one another in the light gun department, both Sega and Nintendo believed that 'bigger was better'. Light guns soon became light bazookas, and adding to the absurdity, the Super Scope was fitted with a shoulder rest and scope – making gamers feel rather awkward in front of the television.

02. Blaze Import Adapter

■ With Europe caught up in an import frenzy, meticulous gamers needed to make sure their rig was equipped for the amplitude of treats from abroad. As US games were too wide for the PAL slot, import adapters extended the cartridge slot upwards allowing all shapes and sizes to be attached.

03. Hudson Soft's Super Multitap

■ Realising the limitations of their earlier *Bomberman* outing on the NES, Hudson Soft bundled a four player adapter with its 16-bit release *Super Bomberman*. Allowing up to four players to connect into one controller port, players began to blast their way through a collection of tangled control pads and angry competitors.

04. Super Advantage/ Score Master

■ In a time when the arcades still offered unmatchable graphics and gameplay, the nearest you could get to the coin-op experience at home was with an arcade stick. Following on from the NES Advantage arcade stick, Nintendo released an updated model for the SNES known as the Super Advantage.

05. Super Everdrive and SNES PowerPak

■ Seen as the more modern alternative to the Super Wild Card, the newly introduced memory card-compatible cartridges allowed gamers to access the entire library of Super Nintendo games without emulation. Eliminating the need to invest deeply for the rarer titles, these state-of-the-art devices come as the ultimate accessory for the SNES.

06. Super Nintendo Mouse

■ Arriving bundled with the novelty graphic software package, *Mario Paint*, the compatibility of the SNES Mouse was often overlooked. Capable of working with over 50 games, the SNES Mouse offered gamers much more precision for the likes of *Sim City* and *Lemmings 2: The Tribes*.

07. Super Game Boy

■ In 1994 a device capable of playing Game Boy games on a Television was introduced to the Super Nintendo. Not only did this device allow full-screen action on games intended for a small LCD display, but it also enhanced the visuals with a range of colour and decorative borders to select Game Boy cartridges.

The Collector's Guide

TOP GAMES TO PLAY

Super Mario Kart

■ Was there ever any doubt that this manic multiplayer racer would make the list? The near-perfect kart racer still remains the pinnacle of the series to this day, and has spawned an abundance of clones.



Starwing/Star Fox

■ Utilising the powerful Super FX chip *Star Fox* was arguably one of the most groundbreaking releases during the Super Nintendo's lifespan, proving 3D was easily done in 16-bit.



The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past

■ Having returned after a four-year hiatus, Link was back in his only outing on the Super Nintendo, proving there was still a plethora of life in the Hyrule legacy.



Super Mario World

■ Following on from the success of the NES hit release *Super Mario Bros 3*, Mario's next appearance on the Super Nintendo strengthened the very roots of the platform genre.



Donkey Kong Country

■ While offering a perfect blend of challenges and frustration, *Donkey Kong Country* should be in every collection purely for its sensational soundtrack and attention to detail.



PLAY THESE NEXT



Super Metroid

■ Eight years after Samus' first appearance, the third game in the *Metroid* series arrived on the SNES in 1994. It offered a doomed space colony to explore and the potential to get lost deep within Planet Zebes. The UK and German releases of *Super Metroid* also came in an oversized box bundled with a 72 page strategy guide.



Pilotwings

■ Falling into the lackluster flight simulation genre, *Pilotwings* was an unexpected hit arriving on launch day for the Super Nintendo. Taking control of some stunt-hungry aviators, your job is to carefully guide a selection of aircraft through hoops and loops. Easier said than done, *Pilotwings* is one of the hardest games to master.



Mega Man X

■ Like every other popular franchise on the NES, *Mega Man* was reborn on the Super Nintendo with a multitude of new abilities. Having outgrown his clunky robotic suit, the blue bomber was now able to dash and kick-jump walls. These tricks might of helped, but it was still an insanely difficult action-platformer.



Super Castlevania IV

■ With Dracula's revival dawning on Simon Belmont, the fourth edition in the hit series *Castlevania* arrived on the Super Nintendo just months after the console's release. Offering a range of graphical trickery, elaborate challenges and a groundbreaking soundtrack, *Super Castlevania IV* confidently built upon the iconic *Castlevania* name.



F-Zero

■ If there was ever a game to demonstrate the potential power and capability of a new system, *F-Zero* was it. Using the newly included feature of Mode 7 graphics on the Super Nintendo, the ultra-fast futuristic racer took faux-3D gaming to an all new level, both graphically and where gameplay is concerned.

TOP IMPORT GAMES

Tales Of Phantasia

■ While this 48 Mbit tale never ventured outside of Japan (before its Game Boy Advance port), fanatical SNES gamers compiled an accessible English translation patch for the Japanese ROM.

Earthbound

■ As RPGs continued to stick to their traditional roots, *Earthbound* broke the mould by creating a humorous, engaging adventure to which just about anybody could relate. Boing!

Final Fantasy III/VI

■ Often battling with *Chrono Trigger* for the title of 'Best SNES RPG', *Final Fantasy VI* (*III* in the US) pushed the genre's limits further than ever with its engrossing 60-plus hour expedition.

Super Mario RPG

■ While Europe was lucky enough to get the majority of Mario's adventures, the unusual combined effort from Squaresoft and Nintendo failed to arrive, much to many PAL gamers disappointment.

Battle Cross

■ While *Super Mario Kart* was dominating sales charts worldwide, this frantic Japanese exclusive was another worthy opponent for the title of 'Best Super Nintendo Multiplayer Racer'.



IMPORT THESE NEXT



Chrono Trigger

■ Squaresoft unquestionably defined the JRPG genre in the Nineties with their vast selection of epic adventures. *Chrono Trigger* was no different, presenting itself as one of the best releases of the decade. If the storyline wasn't enough to convince you, the visuals of *Dragon Quest* and *Dragon Ball Z* artist Akira Toriyama would.



Magical Pop'n

■ In what appears to be a light-hearted side-scrolling adventure, *Magical Pop'n* lures gamers in with its cute visuals shortly before unleashing an unforgettable challenge. After rising to cult hidden-gem status, this Japanese exclusive release developed by Polestar has seen endless competition for ownership on eBay.



The King of Demons (Majyuuou)

■ Often referred to as '*Castlevania* with a gun', *The King of Demons (Majyuuou)* is yet another addition to the list of hidden gems on the SNES. Featuring detailed landscapes and character sprites, the 1995 action game by KSS leaves many gamers wondering why it missed out on an a PAL release.



DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure

■ The top contender for the most sickeningly cute visuals is surely this, Hudson Soft's platformer is the perfect remedy for those gloomy days. Having never left Japan, the highly desirable and enjoyable *DoReMi Fantasy* has seen an incredible rise in value over the last few years.



Ogre Battle: March of the Black Queen

■ Although many will argue *Final Fantasy Tactics* defined the turn-based tactical RPG, *Ogre Battle* has many gameplay hooks which Squaresoft's later release owes inspiration to. While commanding high price-tags today, Atlus recently re-released the game on the PSP.

The Collector's Guide

TOP RAREST PAL GAMES

X Zone

■ Hailing from Scandinavia, this incredibly rare Nordic exclusive was one of the few releases to make use of the under-loved and under-used Super Scope light gun (or should that be light bazooka?)

Cool World

■ Arriving on the Super Nintendo as a tie-in for the (highly forgettable) movie of the same name, the Spanish exclusive of *Cool World* flopped even harder than the disappointing feature film.



Whirlo

■ Continuing to prove Spain has plenty to offer the rarity hunters, this hard-to-find Namco platformer offers much more than rarity alone, as it's an adorable and addictive adventure.

Brawl Brothers

■ By the time Jaleco released this sequel to *Rival Turf*, gamers had grown tired of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups, leaving *Brawl Brothers* to be fought over in years to come.

Aero The Acrobat 2

■ Despite being a rather enjoyable follow-up to *Aero*'s last outing, *Aero The Acrobat 2* exists in numbers arguably smaller than the financial figures it commands. A rarity worth having, if only for future price.



GET THESE NEXT



Daze Before Christmas

■ Rumoured to have only been sold during Christmas of 1994, this seasonal platformer unsurprisingly remains to be one of the tougher Super Nintendo titles to locate. Given its limited holiday shelf-life and lack of re-playability, this festive release sold in very low numbers similar to the Mega Drive game of the same name.



Operation Logic Bomb

■ Arriving as a sequel to the Game Boy top-down shooter *Fortified Zone*, the German release of *Operation Logic Bomb* was a shallow game offering nothing but pretty visuals. Like many Jaleco releases for the SNES, Operation Logic Bomb comes with a rather impressive rarity as collectors attempt to locate the failed shooter.



Space Invaders

■ Despite being a runaway hit in countless 1978 arcades, the PAL Super Nintendo-port of *Space Invaders* was only released in limited quantities throughout Australia. While the game remains a timeless classic, Taito did very little with the arcade port to make it stand out against the wide range of engaging SNES games.



Super Chase HQ

■ Adding the prefix of 'Super' to the name of an older game wasn't always a promise of enhanced gameplay and visuals. Taito took their much-loved arcade hit *Chase HQ* and sculpted an unplayable mess featuring a new in-car view. With such poor review scores, *Super Chase HQ* remained on the shelves, becoming a future rarity.



Hungry Dinosaurs

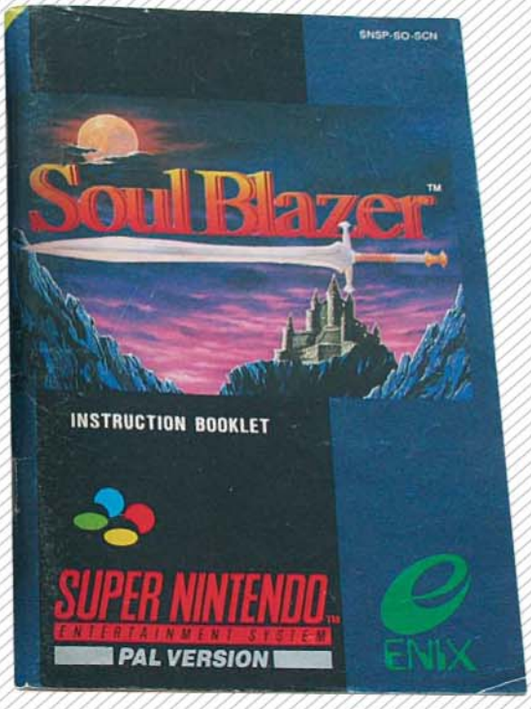
■ There's always a handful of games on any console that just don't click with gamers, *Hungry Dinosaurs* being one of them. Arriving as a two-player hybrid of *Othello* and *Snake*, this incredibly dull stone age-themed release sold poorly following a very negative reception from both gaming publications and gamers themselves.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

It's commonly thought that no English language version of Soul Blazer exists. But is that true? If you turn to an unlikely place, you might just be surprised...















What makes it so special?

■ The most common versions of *Soul Blazer* hail from Europe and are in French or German, rendering it unplayable for the rest of the continent. Unknown to those who continue to import Enix's hit from abroad, an English language version of Soul Blazer has been available all these years, hidden deep within Scandinavia.

Why is it so expensive?

■ While the English language version is highly desirable, there's often another reason for the fluster of bids. The common European versions featured much plainer alternate artwork, surrounded by unattractive black borders. The harder to find game comes with a more attractive cover contained within stylish navy blue borders.

What makes it hard to find?

■ Acquiring the Scandinavian exclusive is no easy feat. Given the nearest to a Nordic eBay is Trader. The possibility of locating it, combined with finding a seller willing to accept offers from abroad, makes obtaining *Soul Blazer* a challenge. Those unwilling to embrace the struggle will have to wait for one to surface on eBay.

The Collector's Guide

THE SUPER NINTENDO GAMES YOU NEED TO OWN

- ACME Animation Factory
- ActRaiser
- ActRaiser 2
- Addams Family Values
- The Addams Family
- The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt
- The Adventures Of Batman & Robin
- The Adventures Of Mighty Max
- Aero The Acro-Bat
- Aero The Acro-Bat 2
- Aguri Suzuki F-1 Super Driving
- Aladdin (Disney's)
- Alien Vs. Predator
- Alien 3
- All-American Championship Football
- Animaniacs
- Another World
- Ardy Lightfoot
- Arkanoid
- Astérix
- Astérix & Obélix
- Axelay
- Batman Returns
- BattleClash
- Battletoads In Battlemaniacs
- Beauty & The Beast (Disney's)
- Beethoven: The Ultimate Canine Caper
- BioMetal
- BlackHawk
- The Blues Brothers
- Boxing Legends Of The Ring
- Brawl Brothers: Rival Turf! 2
- Breath Of Fire II
- Bubsy II
- Cannon Fodder
- Captain Commando
- Casper
- Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss
- Chuck Rock
- Congo's Caper
- Cool Spot
- Cool World
- Cybernator
- Darius Twin
- Daze Before Christmas
- The Death And Return Of Superman
- Demon's Crest

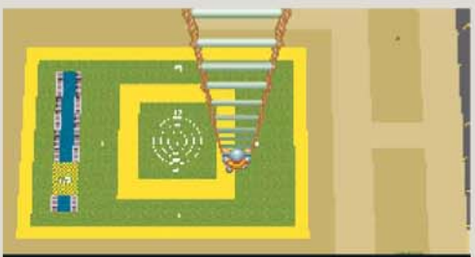


Cannon Fodder



Mega Man X

- Desert Strike: Return To The Gulf
- Dino City
- Donald In Maui Mallard
- Donkey Kong Country
- Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest
- Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!
- Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls
- Dragon Ball Z
- Dragon Ball Z: Hyper Dimension
- Dragon Ball Z: La Légende SAIEN
- Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Menace
- Earth Defence Force
- Earthworm Jim
- Earthworm Jim 2
- Equinox
- F-Zero
- Family Dog
- Fatal Fury 2
- Final Fight
- Final Fight 2
- Final Fight 3
- The Firemen
- Flashback
- Foreman For Real
- Ghoul Patrol
- Gods
- Goof Troop (Disney's)
- GP-1
- Hagane: The Final Conflict
- Harvest Moon
- The Humans
- Hungry Dinosaurs
- Hyper V-Ball
- HyperZone
- Illusion Of Time
- Incantation
- Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures
- International Sensible Soccer: World Champions: Limited Edition Featuring World Cup Teams
- International Superstar Soccer Deluxe
- International Tennis Tour
- Jack Nicklaus Golf
- Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis Tour
- Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja
- Joe & Mac
- Kid Klown In Crazy Chase
- Killer Instinct
- King Of Dragons
- Kirby's Dream Course
- Kirby's Fun Pack
- Kirby's Ghost Trap
- Knights Of The Round
- Legend
- The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja
- The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past
- Lemmings
- Lemmings 2: The Tribes
- Lethal Enforcers
- Loony Toons Basketball
- The Lost Vikings
- The Lost Vikings II: Norse By Norsewest
- Lufia
- Magic Sword
- The Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse
- Mario Paint
- Marko's Magic Football
- Marvel Super Heroes In War Of The Games
- Mega Man 7



Pilotwings

- Mega Man X
- Mega Man X2
- Mega Man X3
- Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge
- Mickey Mania
- Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament
- Mohawk & Headphone Jack
- Mortal Kombat II
- Mr Do!
- Ms Pac-Man
- NBA Jam: Tournament Edition
- Ninjawarriors: The New Generation
- On The Ball
- Operation: Logic Bomb
- Oscar
- Out To Lunch (Pierre Le Chef Is)
- Pac-Attack
- Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures
- Parodius
- Phalanx
- Pilotwings
- Pink Goes To Hollywood
- Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
- Plok
- Pocky & Rocky
- Pocky & Rocky 2
- Pop'n Twin Bee
- Pop'n Twin Bee: Rainbow Bell Adventures
- Power Drive

EXTREMELY RARE	VERY RARE	RARE	UNCOMMON	COMMON	VERY COMMON
Games that have less than a few dozen known copies available.	Very hard to come by. Expect to see only a couple of copies per year.	You should be able to source these in a reasonable amount of time.	You won't find them straight away, but you will after a search.	Always just a click away for the average collector.	So common you'll find them in most bundles of games you buy.

- [] Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers
- [] Prince Of Persia
- [] Prince Of Persia 2
- [] Putty Squad
- [] Puzzle Bobble: Bust-A-Move
- [] R-Type III: The Third Lightning
- [] Radical Rex
- [] Realm
- [] The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp
- [] The Ren & Stimpy Show: Veediots!
- [] Rock 'N' Roll Racing
- [] Sailormoon
- [] Saturday Night Slammasters
- [] Secret Of Evermore
- [] Secret Of Mana
- [] Sensible Soccer: European Champions
- [] Shadowrun
- [] Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye
- [] Side Pocket
- [] SimCity
- [] Skyblazer
- [] Smash Tennis
- [] The Smurfs
- [] The Smurfs: Travel The World
- [] Soccer Kid
- [] Sonic Blast Man
- [] Soul Blazer
- [] Space Invaders
- [] Spanky's Quest
- [] Sparkster
- [] Spawn (Todd McFarlane's): The Video Game
- [] Starwing
- [] Street Fighter Alpha 2
- [] Street Fighter II
- [] Street Fighter II Turbo
- [] Street Racer
- [] Striker
- [] Stunt Race FX
- [] Sunset Riders
- [] Super Adventure Island
- [] Super Adventure Island II
- [] Super Aleste
- [] Super BC Kid
- [] Super Battleship: The Naval Combat Game
- [] Super Bomberman
- [] Super Bomberman 2
- [] Super Bomberman 3



Super Punch-Out!!

- [] Super Castlevania IV
- [] Super Chase HQ
- [] Super Dany
- [] Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts
- [] Super Ice Hockey
- [] Super Mario All-Stars
- [] Super Mario All-Stars & Super Mario World
- [] Super Mario Kart
- [] Super Mario World
- [] Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island
- [] Super Metroid
- [] Super Off Road
- [] Super Pang
- [] Super Probotector: Alien Rebels
- [] Super Punch-Out!!
- [] Super Putty
- [] Super Smash TV
- [] Super Star Wars
- [] Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back
- [] Super Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi
- [] Super Street Fighter II
- [] Super Strike Gunner
- [] Super SWIV
- [] Super Tennis
- [] Super Turrican
- [] Super Turrican 2
- [] Super Widget
- [] Syvalion
- [] Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles IV: Turtles In Time
- [] Terranigma
- [] Tetris & Dr. Mario
- [] Tetris Attack
- [] The Chaos Engine
- [] The Great Circus Mystery Starring Mickey & Minnie
- [] The Lion King (Disney's)
- [] Thomas The Tank Engine & Friends
- [] Time Trax
- [] Tiny Toons Adventures: Buster Busts Loose!
- [] TKO Super Championship Boxing
- [] Top Gear
- [] Top Gear 2
- [] Top Gear 3000
- [] Toys: Let The Toy Wars Begin!
- [] True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links
- [] UN Squadron
- [] Unirally
- [] Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety
- [] Wario's Woods
- [] WarpSpeed
- [] Whirlo
- [] Whizz
- [] Wild Guns
- [] World Cup Striker
- [] Worms
- [] WWF Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game
- [] X Zone
- [] Yoshi's Cookie
- [] Yoshi's Safari
- [] Zero: The Kamikaze Squirrel
- [] Zombies

Collector Q&A

Bryan Paton has been collecting SNES games for years and has amassed an impressive collection



How long have you been collecting for?
I have been collecting Super Famicom games since about 1998. Obviously I had a SNES in the early Nineties, but with the high price and only having pocket money, it was hardly collecting. When I started work in 1996 I suddenly had cash flow. At first all my cash went on Japanese N64 releases but after a couple of years I returned to my roots and I began my Super Famicom collection in earnest.

What does the SNES offer over its peers?
At the time it was easily the most powerful mainstream home console and everything looked amazing. Arcade titles like *Street Fighter II* just blew me away, and many of the most popular franchises have had their best instalments on the SNES. I think the sheer number of quality tiles across all genres is its strength.

Why do you prefer collecting Japanese games to their PAL counterparts?
I swapped a PAL copy of *Pilotwings* for a SFC version of *Hook* and as soon as I saw the box and the design, you could say I was 'hooked' (sorry). The aesthetics of the Japanese designs are, in my opinion, miles ahead of the Western releases. The sheer number of titles available in Japan puts the PAL catalogue to shame. Back in the day, magazines such as *Super Play* influenced my love of Japanese gaming and Japan has such an interesting culture, I think gaming is just an extension of that interest.

What's the most expensive game you own?
Rendering Ranger R2. It goes for silly money now, I've seen copies exchange hands for £500. I was lucky and actually picked it up in 1998 on a trip for about £45 new.

How important are mint boxes to you?
I wont even consider buying a game if it isn't complete and in good condition. Nintendo weren't thinking of the future when they decided cardboard was the way to go and it's getting harder to find games in top condition now, another reason the SNES commands such high prices.

What does your family/wife think of your hobby?
My wife is very understanding of my collection and has even been know to buy me SFC games for my birthday, not that I leave my wanted list lying around deliberately.

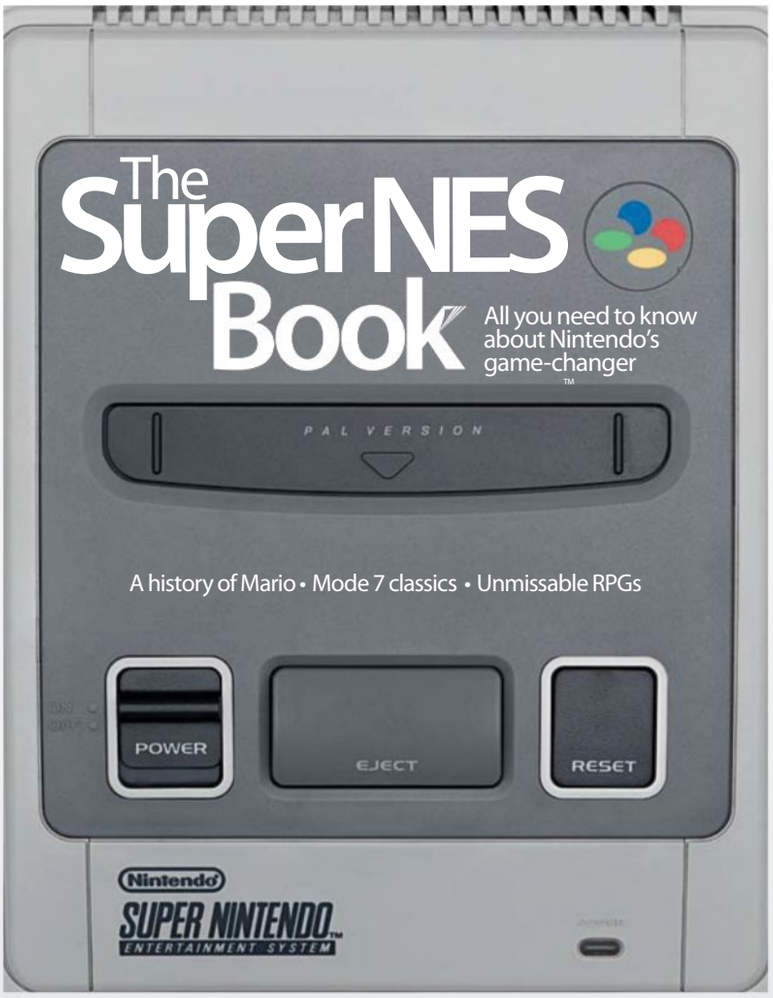
What advice would you give to other gamers interesting in collecting for the SNES?
Decide exactly what games and condition you want them in, and set a budget. Recently the SNES/SFC has become very expensive to collect. I was lucky and got in years ago, and gathered the majority of my 550 boxed games before the price boom. Know what you're getting into.



* Rarity guide courtesy of RETRO COLLECT Head to www.retrocollect.com for more information

Everything you need to know about Sega's 16-bit masterpiece & Nintendo's game changer





The Story of Sonic • Mega-CD
FIFA • Perfect Ten • Shinobi

A History Of Mario • Zelda
Star Wars • Unmissable RPG's

ip IMAGINE PUBLISHING
DigitalEdition
GreatDigitalMags.com